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RED-SKIN TOM; or, THE DEMON'S TRAIL.

BY HARRY HAZARD,

AUTHOR OF "ARKANSAW JACK," ETC., ETC.



THE STRICKEN SAVAGE BOUNDED BACK AND UTTERED HIS THRILLING DEATH-CRY.

Red-skin Tom;

OR,

THE DEMON'S TRAIL.

BY HARRY HAZARD,
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CHAPTER I. AN ALTERCATION.

MID-AFTERNOON of an oppressively hot and sultry day, in the year '54.

We call the reader's attention to a scene, that, if not romantic, is at least attractive and interesting; a wagon-train of emigrants, as is attested by the quantity of driven stock—horses, cattle, and sheep. The presence of women and children is still further evidence.

It moved slowly and drearily along over the vast, almost barren stretch of level plain, as though the nearly-spent day had been one of hard and unrelenting toil. The horses or mules, their heads hanging down, with drooping ears and tails, their hides damp with sweat and covered with the fine sand cast upon the air by the trampling hoofs, or the slowly revolving wheels, scarcely heed the stinging lash or the impatient exclamations of their drivers.

The loose stock move dejectedly along, cured of their morning propensity of running from the trail to snatch a mouthful of grass, or nip the tops of a bush, while more than one of the boys, whose duty it is to keep them within proper limits, dozes in their hard saddles.

But there are three persons who appear full of life and free from the general weariness of mind and body. Three: one of them a woman—a girl; the others men.

The first, who rode several hundred yards in advance, if closely scrutinized, proves to be an old man, who has numbered his half-century, or perhaps nearly a decade more. A close scrutiny, we say, for his figure was as erect and vigorous, his motions as free and supple, the fire of his keen gray eye as clear and penetrating as a generation since.

His hair and long, flowing beard were gray, although the thickly clinging dust effectually disguised this. From his position, his arms, his actions, it was plain he acted as guide to the wagon-train.

The next figure, about half-way between this man and the foremost wagon, was also a man, and merits a brief description at our hands for more than one reason.

In stature he was about the mean height, of a rather slight figure, but with a muscular and active development, clothed in a plain and well-worn suit of gray. His dusky, olive complexion, black hair, and eyes like a slue, had given him the sobriquet of "Dusky Dick," a name that was already famous throughout the West.

Although not much, if any, beyond his third decade, Richard Rouzee, or "Dusky Dick," had followed the calling of a guide for a number of years, and gained the repute of being peculiarly unfortunate, having lost one-half the trains he had acted as pilot for, and rarely escaped without at least one fire and desperate struggle.

More than one dark rumor had been put in circulation, and some more boldly declared that he was in league with the red-skins, and only acted as guide, the more surely to compass his purpose. But this was only conjecture, and could not be substantiated by any valid proof.

The third person, who rode at some little distance to the right, so as to escape the annoying dust, was a young woman of more than common grace and beauty, although the latter quality was somewhat obscured by the long, weary day's travel.

Rather above the medium height, of a superbly rounded and developed form, that was admirably displayed by her neatly-fitting riding-habit of black, she sat her horse with the ease and grace of an accomplished equestrienne, although he chafed and fretted at the restraint of a tightly-drawn rein, caracoling and prancing in proud strength and spirit.

It was a clear-cut profile and beautiful complexion that Dusky Dick beheld from the corner of his dark, sinister eye, that glared with a fire of unusual admiration. But this his slouched hat concealed, and his smooth, beardless face gave no outward sign of the dark and troubled thoughts that filled his brain.

Then he pricked his half-wild mustang viciously with his spur, and darted suddenly up beside the lady, who uttered a half-suppressed exclamation of annoyance, and made no at-

tempt to conceal the expression of dislike and impatience that clouded her usually sunny features.

"It has been a wearisome day, Miss Clara," began the guide, speaking in a low and remarkably musical voice, although his eyes flashed as he noticed her evident aversion. "But we are almost at the end of our day's journey. See—that long dark line yonder, a little to the left, is our stopping-place, beside a clear and beautiful stream. I know the spot, well."

"So we camp there? Well, I am glad of it, for more than one reason," replied the lady, in an impatient tone.

"And may I ask why so?"

"Do you wish to know the truth?" asked Clara, with a slight emphasis.

"Certainly; the truth will be doubly pleasant, coming from such winsome lips," Dusky Dick returned, with a half-mocking bow and smile.

"Well then, the main reason is, that once there, you will have other things to attend to, and will not have so much leisure to annoy others by impertinent and unwelcome attentions," curtly replied Clara, urging her high-mettled horse ahead, as if desirous of escaping the company of the swarthy guide.

"And another reason is—that a certain baby-face, Buenos Ayres by name, will not be long in feeding his horses, and then, of course, will hasten to pay his respects to the belle of the wagon-train," sneered Dusky Dick, keeping close to Clara, whether she rode fast or slow.

"Mr. Rouzee," at length exclaimed Clara, her eyes flashing angrily, and her cheeks flushing, "your place as guide is yonder, along with Tom Maxwell, and not out here. If I appear rude, you force me to be so."

"A guide's place depends greatly upon circumstances, Miss Calhoun; and just now I prefer this position."

"Then occupy it alone. I will go back to the wagon," she added, reining in her horse.

"Stay, Miss Clara," cried Rouzee, his black eyes glittering. "Keep your place, but mark me, the time will come—and soon too—when you will repent these haughty airs, and solicit as a favor what you now affect to scorn. I tell you that the time is not far distant when you will crouch at my feet—when you will hang around me for a word—a smile; when you will call me *master*. Do you hear?"

"And I tell you, sir, that when we camp to-night, you will have to answer to the charge of being drunk while upon duty," haughtily retorted Clara, her eyes flashing. "Will you go, sir, or must I appeal to my father?"

The guide did not reply, but plunging his long cruel spurs into the flanks of his mustang, he dashed rapidly up alongside of the old borderer, Tom Maxwell, who received him with a cold, half-suspicious start. Evidently there was little love lost between the two men.

Just before sunset the long line of trees was reached, that bordered upon a small stream, and preparations were immediately begun for encamping, while Dusky Dick and Tom Maxwell galloped off to hunt for "sign."

The mules and horses were ungearied and turned loose, after being hopped, and the wagons were formed into a rude sort of corral, one line covering the joints in the other. All was bustle and apparent confusion, although each person knew his duty and busied himself about that alone.

Fires were built, and over them stooped the women, preparing supper for the different messes; while the children brought wood and water, or else rolled and tumbled over each other with merry shouts in their play, little recking what the morrow might bring forth.

To one of these fires, a little apart from the remainder, we now turn. Over it is bending the form of an old negro woman, whose wrinkled features and gorgeous red and orange head-gear, looked weird and wild through the flame-tinted smoke.

A little to one side of this sat three persons, or rather half-reclining against the moss-covered roots of the gigantic oak tree, idly watching the motions of "Aunt Medora," as she turned the frying bacon, or the nicely-browning "hoe-cake." One of these was Clara Calhoun; the others were men.

The eldest one—tall, portly and of soldierly bearing—was her father, the leader or captain of the wagon-train. Of perhaps fifty years of age, his muscular frame gave no evidence of decay, and the fire of youth still seemed to shine in his large dark eyes. The heavy, grizzled mustache and beard, gave a somewhat stern cast to his features, that were massive and regular, and his voice, used to command, enhanced

this idea; but at heart he was kind and gentle.

The other was a young man, between his fifth and sixth *lustrum*, with a handsome, manly face and form; with a calm, steadfast look in his gray eye that instinctively commanded one's respect, and told that he could be depended upon in any emergency, however dangerous or trying.

His garments were plain and almost poor, but there was an air of conscious independence and freedom in his bearing and demeanor, that attracted one, despite himself.

"Father, do you know that I think you made a great mistake in hiring this Dusky Dick, or whatever may be his name, to act as guide?"

"Why so, Clara?" asked her parent, with an air of surprise.

"Well, you may laugh at me, or call me visionary, but I shudder whenever he comes near me. I believe that he is a traitor, and has some deep purpose of his own that means danger to us all. If you ask my reason, I can only say what I have; I only feel that he's not what he seems, and I shall never rest easy until we are well rid of him."

"I don't like him overly well, myself," slowly replied Calhoun, "but still, I think he is honest and trustworthy."

"Then why does he not attend to his business, instead of intruding where he can't help but see his presence is unwelcome?" warmly cried Clara.

"Why, daughter, what do you mean? What has he been doing?"

"Just this. I can't stir a step from the wagons, but what he is at my side, with his disagreeable smile and worse compliments. At first I did not appear to mind them, but of late he has grown still more impudent, and the worse I rebuff him, the more he persists, until now, unless it is put a stop to, I will feel obliged to keep within the wagon all the time."

"You never spoke of this before, Clara," uttered Calhoun, slowly. "If he has troubled you so much, why not have told me?"

"Because I thought he would desist, and then there would be no trouble. But to-day he grossly insulted me."

"Stay, Buenos," commanded the major, placing a hand upon the young man's arm, as he made a motion of anger—"let me settle this. He insulted you, Clara?"

"Yes. He told me that the time was not far distant when I would crouch at his feet, and be glad to call him *master*!" exclaimed the maiden, her eyes flashing.

"But what led to this?"

"I hardly remember, but I told him he had other duties to perform, that would become him better than forcing his company upon those to whom it was unwelcome. I had tried to leave him by riding faster, to one side, or by falling back: but he kept close beside me."

Major Calhoun arose and glanced around upon the animated scene. The two guides had returned, and were awaiting supper, meanwhile smoking their pipes.

"Tom Maxwell, come here for a moment," called the leader, and the tall guide sprang nimbly to his feet and approached the group, lifting the dirty felt hat, with an almost reverential bow to Clara.

"Maxwell, my man, I wish to ask your advice, and I trust you will be plain and candid, in your reply," began Calhoun.

"Maje, I'm Tom Maxwell, an' you've hearn tell o' me afore now; but did you ever hear 'at I lied, or made a practice o' any sech a dirty, sneakin' business? The truth is a mighty broad an' plain trail, boss, to them which is clear in the sight, an' my ol' mother lart me to squint true 'long that trail, tellin' me—'Now, sonny, jest foller your nose, an' go ahead!' An' ever sence then, I've did so, on'y, mayhap, steppin' a leetle to one side in the matter o' a red-skin, or sech like; but I al'ays tuck it up jest whar I left it. I'll tell you the truth ef it busts me—go on!"

Calhoun appeared used to the somewhat rambling style of the old guide, and resumed:

"We were just talking about this Dusky Dick, as you call him; what is your opinion of him, Tom?"

"H-u-m! As a guide or a man?"

"Well—both."

"Ya—as," drawled Maxwell, smoking rapidly. "Fust, as a guide. He's quick an' sharp-witted, knows a buffler-chip from a ant hill; he is dead shore on a trail or fer sign; a bully shot, rider, an' all that; kin tell you, or mark down like a printed map, every river, crick an' water-hole that is atween here an' Salt Lake. Or to sum it up, as the lawyers o' St. Loney'd say, he knows every feet o' the trail, kin tell whar

to expect Injuns, or not to expect 'em, ekil to anybody what lives an' breathes."

"You praise him up very highly, Tom," remarked Buenos Ayres.

"Do I, then? That's jest as folks thinks. But honest, I don't know a single man 'at I'd rather hev along 'th me, 'n this very Dusky Dick, *per-vidin'*, mind ye, thet he hed some strong intrust in the train's gittin' through right side up, all hunky. But ef so be he hed a spite ag'inst anybody, then I'd rather hev the devil hisself fer a chum," he said, earnestly.

"Well, as a man," added Major Calhoun.

"Wal, fust; he shoots off his mouth too durned much; he'd talk the ha'r off 'm a buffler bull's hump, an' not more'n hafe try. He's wuss 'n old Daddy Lapyear, the preacher-man which used to keep camp-meetin' nigh to whar I lived when a little shaver; an' more'n that couldn't be said. Look at his eyes—look at his face—look at his motion; look at him all over, well. The hull outfit sais *snake*, jest as plain as geese-geese; an' the wust kind o' sarpint, too—the ongainly, sneakin' copperhead.

"Ef he tuk a dislike to a feller, would he come right out flatfooted an' tell him so? Nary time—not muchly! He'd lay low an' bite 'em in the heel. He's p'izon, I tell ye, p'izon from head to toe, an' sartin death. Ef he gives you a black look, jest putt your heel on his head an' squash it. But look to your boots, fust. G'f me a match, youngster."

Calhoun then repeated the threats of Dusky Dick, he had that day addressed to Clara, and then awaited Tom's reply, in some anxiety of mind.

"An' he said *that—he did!*" slowly returned Maxwell, his brow knitting, as he puffed furiously at his relighted pipe.

"Those words, or to the same effect."

"Wal, then, thar's snags ahead, boss, you kin just bet your high old ocean ware!" exclaimed Tom. "What're you goin' to do 'bout it?"

"I don't know, just yet. That is what I asked your opinion for."

"Wal, then, ef he said them words, he *meant* somethin'. He ain't the sort o' feller to shoot his mouth off at nothin', when he's mad, jest fer the fun o' hearin' hisself talk. Look here—do you know 'at he's lost *four* trains in the last two years? an' that one more jest got through by stud-hoss luck, after two days' hard fightin'? I don't say 'at he's in cahoot 'th the reds, not a-tall; but ef I hed a spite ag'in' this 'ere train, an' wanted to git it wiped out, I'd jest go to Mister Dusky Dick, Esquire, an' say—'*Whar's the 'brigyness, Dick?*'" significantly replied Tom, tapping one horny finger against the other palm.

"Then what do you advise, Maxwell?" somewhat anxiously asked Major Calhoun, deeply impressed by the earnest words of the veteran guide.

"What do I 'vise? Now thar you've got me, as Joe Nerr said to the whale when he sucked him in. What *d'you* think?"

"I thought some of discharging him," was the thoughtful reply.

"The very wust thing you could do! 'Cause why. Ef he is a runnygade, thet is jest what he'd choose hisself, an' then he'd hold high, low, jack in his hand, 'th a fa'r show o' ketchin' the game, to boot. No, sir! You must keep him, an' say nothin' to make him 'spicious, an' then—*watch 'im*. You'll watch—the young feller, he'll watch, an' I'll watch, an' it's hard but what we kin manidge to keep him in trim."

"S—st!" cautioned Ayres, rising erect, with hand upon his ready revolver. "So, Mister Du ky Dick, this is a specimen of your manners, is it? Eavesdroppin'!" he added, as the form of the guide stepped out from behind the tree beneath which the party were sitting.

"Should the *criminal* be absent when he is being tried?" sneered Rouzee, with a slight emphasis on the word italicised. "I was passing by—I heard my name coupled with treachery—and so I paused."

"Jest so—I was hungry—I saw a fat goose—I stole it, said the fox!" murmured Tom, carelessly hitching his belt around. "I told you he was a snake!"

"And what did you hear?" demanded Calhoun, arising.

"I heard myself accused of treachery—of being a renegade, and in collusion with the Indians. If not in so many words, at least plainly enough to be understood," said Dusky Dick, deliberately.

"Well then—what is your answer?"

"What can it be? You are dissatisfied with me, and condemn me unheard. I will not serve any man who does not trust me fully. Tom

Maxwell, yonder, knows the route quite as well as I do, and is capable of acting alone. I will bid you good-by, now."

"You mean to leave us?"

"Yes."

"If you heard so much, Mr. Rouzee, as you say, surely you heard Maxwell's last words?" coldly added Major Calhoun. "We prefer not to part with you; at least, not until we have reached a safer portion of the country than this is."

"True as preachin'!" softly interjected the old guide.

"Do you mean to detain me against my will?" said Dusky Dick, stepping back a pace.

"If necessary—yes."

"By force?"

"By force, if you compel us to adopt harsh measures," impatiently exclaimed the major.

"Now look here, Mr. Calhoun," began Rouzee in a firm tone. "I'm a free man, and not bound to you in any way. I have honestly performed my part of the contract thus far, and if I choose to leave you now, all you can do is to retain my wages. Do this if you will, but I'll not stay with you any longer."

"Ef I hed a jass-ack what wouldn't go, d'y' think I'd wallop 'im!—bet your monkey-musek I *would!*" gently whistled Tom Maxwell, eying Dusky Dick with a benignant smile from beneath his battered slouch hat.

"You are but one—we are three—or if but one word is spoken aloud, fifty."

"And I am Dusky Dick!" cried the guide, in a defiant tone. "You have heard of me before now, but you will *know* me, if you persist in this outrage. I tell you that I *will* go, and there is but one thing that can stop me—*death!*" and as he spoke, he leaped back so as to place the trio in front of him, and drawing a brace of revolvers, he cocked them with a clear, significant click.

"That long-legged beauty yonder told you that I could shoot true, and for once he told the truth. You may keep me here; but it will not be while I can draw trigger or sight along a barrel. Stop!" he added, sternly, as the three men made a motion toward advancing. "The first weapon drawn, or the first step toward me, will be the death-warrant of Miss Clara yonder! Before God, I will shoot her, if I am molested!"

They saw that he was in terrible earnest, and instinctively shrunk back.

"Shell I take him, maje—shell I take him?" hoarsely whispered the old guide, his form crouching and trembling with anger at the rebel's audacity.

"No—no, don't stir, Tom—for your life, don't!" cried Calhoun, fearfully. "The devil will shoot her if you do! Go, then, if you wish it, but if you harm one of the party I will hunt you down like a dog! Go while you can," he added, bitterly.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Dusky Dick, "you are very generous, Major Calhoun, and I congratulate you upon the facility with which you reverse your decision. I *will* go, but you may expect me again very soon. I love Miss Clara too greatly to abandon her so abruptly, for good."

"Shoot him, father!" cried Clara, as she sprang up behind the huge tree-trunk. "Never mind me—don't let him brave you so!"

The three men abruptly turned around at this sudden interruption, and then, as they saw that the maiden's maneuver placed her in comparative safety, they quickly drew their weapons; but the guide had vanished, and his taunting laugh of defiance echoed back through the woods.

"After him, Tom—Buenos! and shoot him like a wolf, if you find him!" shouted Calhoun, as the three men dashed through the timber, in the direction from whence had come the insolent laugh.

But their efforts at Dusky Dick's capture were all in vain, although the majority of the now fully aroused campers set out in pursuit of the fugitive; and one by one they returned to their now cold supper, silent and filled with a dim foreboding of impending peril.

"It's a bad job, maje, a pesky bad job," quoth Tom Maxwell, as he helped himself, to a fresh supply of the rude but wholesome viands; "an' I'm dub'ous that it hain't all over yit. He never shed 'a' got away—never! But who under the sun would 'a' thunk he'd 'a' p'inted them pistols at Miss Clara? The dratted sarpint! Burnin's too good for sech as he is! Lord—Lord! what's this world a-comin' to, when sech pesky critter, is made?"

Double guards were posted that night, and an unusually strict watch was kept, but the

long night passed by without further event worthy of record, and as the sun arose, it shone down upon the party slowly trailing along their weary way.

CHAPTER II.

THE STORM-CLOUD BREAKS.

THE next day and the next passed by without any event other than such usually attendant upon an emigrant's daily toil along the almost endless trail, and the majority of the party were inclined to laugh at the parting words of Dusky Dick, as mere vaporings, proceeding from chagrin.

But not so with all. Tom Maxwell did not take this view of it, nor did the major or Buenos Ayres, and a steady, unremitting watch was kept up, both night and day, while great precautions were used in selecting the nightly encampment.

Toward night of the second day succeeding the departure of Rouzee, the veteran guide paused until the wagon driven by young Ayres, in which also sat Major Calhoun, came up beside him.

"What's up now, Max?"

"Nothin', maje, as I knows on," replied Tom. "But look yonder—d' y' see them 'ar trees, jest beyon' that point o' risin' ground?"

"Certainly."

"Well, that's the place to camp to-night. Plenty of wood, water an' grass."

"Well?" queried the leader, seeing that something lay beyond the guide's words.

"I don't know, boss, but what you'll laugh at me, an' think I mought be in better bizness, but—" hesitated Tom, a little nervously.

"Why should I, Tom? I certainly should not if you are in earnest. But what's the matter?"

"Jest this: you hain't forgot what Dusky Dick said, nor hain't I nither. It's be'n a-run-in' in my mind all day, an' I can't help thinkin' that thar's so'thin' in it. You know he said that we'd see him ag'in, an' his eyes said, jest as plain as a nigger's heel, that if we did, it would not be *alone*."

"Then you think—?"

"I reckon; leastways I 'spect so. Ef you ax what, why I'll bet a buffler-hump ag'in' a turkey buzzard, that we'll 'ither see or hear so'thin' o' Mr. Dusky Dick, afore another sun. I feel it all over me."

"What are you going to do?" somewhat impatiently asked Major Calhoun.

"First, I'm goin' to scout 'round ontel dusk. I know the lay right well around here, an' it's jist the out-doin'est place you ever did see, for bushments and Injun deviltries. It's a plain shoot for the river thar, an' you won't need me for that."

"Well, don't be gone long, nor run any more risk than is absolutely necessary, Maxwell," earnestly added Calhoun; "for you are our only dependence, now. I don't believe there is one of us all that has the slightest idea of where we are, or the road necessary to take, in order to reach safety."

"Maje," slowly said the old guide, "I'm a rough old coon, what ain't o' much a'count one way nor t'other; I hain't got no kin, nor 'lations livin', as I knows on. I never hed a wife—leastways, nobody 'cept it mought be a squaw, now an' then, for a week or so, an' I never hed a child who could call me pap; but for all that, I know how you must feel when you look at Miss Clara, an' think 'at she's in danger."

"I ain't o' much a'count, as I said, for I'm old an' most wore out, but still I'd fou't as hard as the best, for the few drops o' blood in my karkidge, an' I say sooner than let her get hurt, even to her teentiest finger, why I'd be shot, burnt, cut to pieces and then swallered hole! I would, by ge-mently!"

"I believe you, Tom, but I hope there'll be no call for your doing all that," laughed Calhoun.

"Wal, jist follow your nose, an' stop yonder ontel I git back," and then loosening the tightly drawn rein against which his half-wild mustang was chafing, the grizzled old guide sped swiftly away from the wagon-train.

Once beyond sight of the trail, Maxwell proceeded more slowly and with greater precaution. Veering to the right, so as to embrace as much ground as possible in his contemplated *detour*, he closely scrutinized the ground for sign, while keeping a wary look-out upon either hand and in front, not caring to run blindfold into an ambush should there in reality prove to be enemies in his vicinity.

He was proceeding thus when his horse suddenly gave a snort and stood still in his track. Quickly raising his eyes from the ground, the

old guide sent a keen glance around him, and then uttered a long, low whistle, as he perceived the evident cause of his animal's alarm.

Just debouching from the hills, or rather from behind them, was a large body of horsemen, and though at nearly a mile's distance, he had no hesitation in pronouncing them to be Indians, from the long spears and various trappings, together with their peculiar style of riding. They were to the right, and at the same time a little in his front, being nearly in a direct line with himself and the place where the emigrants intended to camp for the night.

They had evidently observed him, and had paused, as if in irresolution, thus allowing Maxwell a moment for deliberation.

They might be friendly, but he did not believe it, and felt little inclined to cultivate their close acquaintance. Still he did not like to run, for he well knew the truth of the old adage—a fleeing form invites pursuit—and that should he flee the rogues would assuredly chase him.

Then were they hostile, as he more than suspected, the emigrants would undoubtedly be the sufferers, as they had not yet had time to encamp and corral the wagons in order of defense. Outnumbered and taken by surprise they would be massacred without mercy.

Tom Maxwell did not believe that their exact position was known by the Indians, from the unguarded movements of the latter, and resolved to draw them away, if possible, or at least detain them until the emigrants would be better prepared for the meeting.

"Come, Ebenezer," he muttered, drawing up the reins and settling himself firmly in the deep saddle; "you hain't any much tired as yit, an' kin hold your own with these scalawags, for a bit, anyhow. Now you jest git up an' git!"

As he spoke, Maxwell urged the sturdy mustang onward, uttering a wild yell and bending low down.

As if decided upon their course by the old man's action, the Indians dashed after him, in silence. The look of anxiety upon Maxwell's face deepened as he noted this fact, for it served to confirm his already strong suspicions.

He knew that only some great and powerful motive could induce an Indian to suppress the vindictive, exultant yell usual when their foe and an anticipated victim is before them; and what could that motive be, unless it was a desire not to alarm the company of emigrants whom he had been guiding? More than ever he believed that Dusky Dick was connected with this new phase, and if so, he would need to be doubly wary and foresighted.

Instead of riding direct toward the camp, Maxwell pursued a course that would carry him past it, at about a mile's distance, with a considerable ridge intervening, intending to draw the savages entirely away from the wagon-train, if possible, but at any risk to protract the race until a more favorable moment.

His thorough knowledge of the surrounding country now stood him in good stead. The hills loomed up before him, and the valley he was now in appeared to extend clear through beyond the high ground, but in reality it ended in a *cul de sac*, from which escape would be almost impossible.

Veering a little to the right, he dashed on, with an occasional glance back at his pursuers. He was gratified to see that he at any rate had maintained his vantage-ground, and, barring an accident, he felt confident of baffling pursuit until the shades of night afforded him secure cover.

Maxwell knew that by rounding the now near hill, he would find a clear route to the plains beyond, whose small *mottes* of timber were scattered at short intervals. Close along the further side of these hills, the river ran; then making an abrupt turn, flowed through the level ground.

Maxwell was much attached to "Ebenezer," his horse, but when it was placed against the welfare of the train, and that of Clara Calhoun, for whom he had taken a deep and fervent liking, he did not hesitate. He resolved to abandon the mustang, and trust to good fortune to recover him again.

Still, at nearly a mile in advance of his pursuers, the guide rounded the hill, and reached the river side. Dismounting, he struck the horse a sharp blow, and thus turned him loose. True to his plans, Ebenezer dashed madly away up the river, toward the nearest clump of timber, with a wild snort of alarm and pain.

Running along a few yards in an opposite direction, Maxwell crouched down in a rocky hollow, with a fast-beating heart and an anxious face. He knew that, was his ruse discovered too soon, his life would be forfeited, beyond all doubt. True, he still held his rifle and revol-

vers, but what would his one arm avail against those of over three-score savages?

He saw the mustang disappear behind the *motte*, at full speed, and hoped that his pursuers had not yet gained a position from whence they could note the absence of its rider. If they had not, then he felt that he was safe.

Then the enemy spurred swiftly by, following keenly upon the plain trail, without a pause or single glance around the point. Then, they, too, passed behind the timber island.

Chuckling heartily, Tom arose and entering the water, ran lightly along its edge, until he came to a small log, lying upon the shore. Rolling this into the water, the guide secured his rifle upon it, and then entering the swift current, swam rapidly down-stream, pushing the float before him, thus keeping his gun and powder dry.

As he came in view of the wagon-train, he uttered a loud, clear shout, and leaving the water, ran lightly toward the camp, which was all confusion.

"What is it, Tom? Where's your horse?" excitedly asked the major, as he met the old scout.

"Boun' for Salt Lake, takin' a wheen o' pesky red-skins to visit ol' Brigham!"

"What do you mean?"

"Jest what I say. But we hain't got no time to talk now—thar's work to be did. Dusky Dick an' a wheen o' red imps is on the rampage, red-hot fer ha'r, an' 'll pay us a visit afore sun-up to-morry."

"How do you know?" anxiously queried Calhoun.

"'Ca'se I see'd 'em. Don't jabber—work!" impatiently added Tom, as he entered the little corral.

He glanced around, anxiously taking in every detail, and then added, in a voice of disgust:

"What on airth was you fellers a-thinkin' about, anyhow? Don't you see you'd orter bin out yander, away from the river? They kin swim down in the dark, an' take us in the r'ar, now. But it's too late to mend that now, so do as I do. They'll be here in less'n a-nour now, fer they'll know we're on the lookout, soon's they find Ebenezer."

The corral had been formed close to the river-bank, in a half-circle, and in the usual manner; that is, in two rows of wagons, the one covering the joints in the other. By Tom Maxwell's directions, the wheels were let down in holes hastily dug, so that the axles rested upon the prairie, and the openings were still further barricaded by articles taken from the wagons.

The fires were extinguished and the women and children stowed away in as perfect security as could be obtained, in the inner tier of vehicles. But while doing so, a startling discovery was made.

There was one missing—Clara Calhoun was in no place to be found! A few minutes' quest showed them that she was not within the corral!

And then Maxwell found that her horse was also missing from the others. In an agony of apprehension Calhoun hastened to and fro, eagerly questioning each one as to when they had last noticed her.

All he could learn was simply this: Clara had been riding, as usual, and at some little distance to one side of the train, just before Tom Maxwell started out on his reconnaissance. During the confusion anent the encamping, she had been lost sight of. No one could say more than this.

"What can we do, Tom?" anxiously asked Calhoun, to the gloomy guide.

"Not much, unless she comes in o' herself. The reds is snoopin' 'round, an' 'll be most sartin to gobble up any as goes out to hunt fer her. But I'll resk it, anyhow, fer a bit. Keep the boys to work, an' don't git fooled, 'fore I come back."

Then the old guide left the corral and hastened along the back trail, soon disappearing amid the fast-gathering shadows. And thus an hour passed by, when the whistle of Maxwell was heard, followed in a few moments by himself; but he alone.

"Where is she, Tom?"

"The good Lord on'y knows, boss. Leastways, I don't. Didn't see hide nor ha'r o' her. But the reds is a-comin'."

"Do they know where we are?"

"Reckon so; but ef not, they'll soon find us."

"If they do find us, how do you think it'll end, Maxwell?" queried an emigrant, in a tone of anxiety.

"I kin tell better a'ter it's over, fri'nd," dryly replied Tom, with a significant shrug. "But ef they don't git no more to help 'em, why we

stand a fa'r show. They're on'y three to one."

"Only! And isn't that enough, for conscience' sake?"

"Fri'nd, where a feller is fightin' fer his wife an' liddle ones, he's ekil to *four*, what's on'y themselves," and then silence once more reigned throughout the corral, at least so far as conversation was concerned.

But as may be imagined, the suspense and misgiving of the father, with others, was terrible, when they thought of what might have befallen the missing maiden. It was well that the welfare of the train helped to divide their thoughts. Without some such duty, their thoughts would have been doubly distracting.

It was plain that nothing more could be done, until after the threatened peril had passed. Until then, they could only hope and pray that no serious evil might befall the wanderer.

Thus far, nothing had been seen or heard of the savages, and a number of the emigrants half-believed that the old guide had been deceived, and that the party of red-skins had been peaceable ones, who had no designs upon the train.

The sky was clear and unclouded, and the full moon had already arisen. Whether this last fact was a blessing or otherwise, was an open question to the emigrants, for if it served to betray the enemy in case they attempted a surprise, it would likewise furnish sufficient light by which the death-dealing bullet, or the scarcely less to be dreaded arrow, could be directed with almost the certainty of one at mid-day.

As an offset to the error in corraling the wagons upon the river-bank, there were no trees or bushes within short gunshot of the encampment, while the plain was level and smooth almost as a floor, so that, for over a hundred yards, the savages would be forced to advance right in the teeth of their enemy.

Old Tom Maxwell was regarded by all as a sort of leader, and each word he spoke was earnestly listened to, and every hint of direction promptly obeyed, without a murmur or a protest.

It was some two hours or more, after the moon had arisen, that the first sign of the enemy's presence was observed, and only the well-trained eye of the old guide could at first discern the suspicious object. He quickly glided from man to man, whispering to each:

"Thar's a red out yon', snoopin' 'round to diskiver ef so be we're on the lookout. Now don't spile it all, but take it cool an' do jest as I say. Ef he on'y keeps to the outside, why let 'im go, but ef he a'tempts to enter, then wipe him out as quickly as you know how. Don't make no n'se, nor don't let him make none, nyther."

As he returned to his post, old Tom saw that the spy had drawn considerably nearer, until the paint-bedaubed face could be distinctly seen, as the moon's bright rays streamed full upon his cautiously uplifted head.

The eyes of the veteran scout began to glisten, and his hands nervously clutched at his rifle, as though eager to put a final period to the night-prowling of the painted demon, but then his habitual coolness returned, and he calmly awaited the denouement.

The spy gradually drew nearer to the double row of wagons, and paused close beside the outer line, just in front of Maxwell. He uttered a low grunt as of disgust, as he found that the beds were almost upon a level with the ground, and that he could not pass beneath them, as he evidently intended.

Then he turned aside and slowly began skirting the corral. Although it was a trying ordeal, the emigrants obeyed their leader's orders to the very letter, even suspending their breath as the spy gently stole along the line.

Apparently this worthy became fully convinced that the emigrants were soundly sleeping in false security, for he at length began to climb over the barricade. Perhaps he was after plunder, or mayhap he was a young brave, burning to distinguish himself and to win a name among his people, by taking the first scalp.

But if so, he was doomed never to realize his dream, for as he leaped lightly to the ground, a pair of strong hands were instantly twined around his throat, effectually checking all outcry, while another of the emigrants plunged a keen knife deep into the broad, swelling chest. One faint, gurgling groan, a convulsive quiver, and the spirit of the red-man fled from the ghastly wound and took up the trail to the happy hunting-grounds.

Tom Maxwell glided quickly to the scene of

death, and bent eagerly over the corpse, scanning its features closely by the clear moonlight.

"It's a dratted 'Rapahoe, boys, but I don't know him. You did it up slick, but it's on'y jest a beginnin'; they'll send out another, when he don't come back on time, to l'arn what's up. So hunker down an' wait. Don't one o' you fire, though, ontel I give the word."

Perhaps another half-hour slowly dragged its weary length along, before any thing more occurred to break this painful suspense, and then another dusky form was observed coming from much the same direction as that followed by the ill-fated spy. They all knew that the crisis was now close at hand, and every nerve was steeled, and though many a heart beat faster than usual, there was none that fluttered with fear.

The second spy had advanced to within a dozen yards of the corral, when one of the eagerly watching emigrants fell forward, and accidentally touched the trigger of his cocked rifle. The sharp report rung out upon the still night air, sounding to the startled men like the roar of artillery.

At the same moment the spy arose to his feet and turned to flee, uttering a wild whoop of alarm. But it was his last cry upon earth, for the quick eye of Maxwell directed the unerring rifle, and at the red-skin's second leap, the quick report rung out, and the second victim of the list that was yet to follow, died without a groan.

Like an accompaniment to the double shot, there came a blood-curdling chorus of yells and whoops, and a horde of dusky fiends were seen to spring up as if from the bowels of the earth, upon the level plain beyond.

"Look out, boys! here they come!" yelled old Tom, as he sprung to his feet and began rapidly reloading his rifle. "Take it cool, but give it hot. It's fer life, now!"

As the dusky fiends swarmed close to the barricade, a blinding flash rose along the line, and at such near quarters, the effect was deadly in the extreme. Shrill cries of agony were blended with yells of rage, as a number of assailants fell, dead or dying, before the scathing volley.

The savages paused, as if in stupor, and then as the terrible quick-repeating revolvers began to play upon their crowded ranks, their ardor suddenly cooled, and as if by magic they disappeared, leaving their fallen as they lay, upon the field. A wild exultant shout followed them, for it seemed as if the repulse was complete.

"Save your breath, boys," said the veteran guide, with a silent but joyous laugh; "fer you'll need it, every smich, afore day. This is on'y the primin', an' the rail airnest work is yit to come. Fodder up an' look out fer breakers!"

"Then you think they'll make another attack?" anxiously queried Major Calhoun, who stood beside Maxwell, reloading his weapons with the rapidity of an expert.

"Bet Ebenezer ag'in' a jack-rabbit—which is long odds—that they will. They didn't know we was ready for 'em, but they've l'arnt a lesson now, an' they never need more'n one o' that kind to open thar eyes."

This was probably the reason of the strange recklessness and want of caution that the Indians had exhibited, for such is not their usual nature.

They most likely believed that the shots had been fired by an alarmed sentinel, and then made their quick rush, hoping to overpower the startled and bewildered emigrants before they were well awakened and aware of the real facts.

And then, when greeted in such a deadly manner, they perceived the error they had fallen into, fleeing in confusion and momentary dismay.

But as the old guide had predicted, the worst was yet to come, and the savages would be doubly desperate now, from the heavy loss they had experienced.

Their approaches now would be all the more to be dreaded, because they would be conducted with all caution and subtleness.

During the entire assault and repulse the savages had scarce fired a dozen shots, and not one of the emigrants was harmed, so well were they sheltered. But one of the horses, who had been tethered at either end of the barricade near the banks of the river, had been struck by a random bullet and killed.

As it alarmed the others, By Maxwell's direction, the body was pushed over the bank into the river.

And then each man returned to his post, while those detailed to watch the water-side retained their position.

CHAPTER III.

A WILD RACE.

MEANWHILE, where was the missing maiden, Clara Calhoun?

Let us glance back and learn.

The information gleaned by Major Calhoun from the emigrants was correct, so far as it went. Clara had been riding, as usual, and when she had learned the spot chosen for the encampment, which she could readily locate by the neighboring grove of trees, she resolved to enjoy a little gallop ere night fell, and by this means she would also avoid much of the disagreeable noise and confusion attendant upon halting.

So she bore abruptly to the right, and with loosened rein dashed merrily away, the proud mustang tossing his head gladly at this unusual relaxation.

But Clara's little ride was destined to be carried out upon a scale of far greater importance than she had anticipated, and ere it was ended, she was fated to undergo a season of peculiar trial.

From before her horse's feet there sprung up a rabbit—one of that overgrown breed popularly known as "jack-rabbits," which, if not often palmed off on greenhorns as full-grown mules, as Westerners frequently assert, are sufficiently large to astonish those used only to the more diminutive species common to "the States"—and dashed away over the short grass, clearing fully half a score yards at each jump.

Clara's eyes sparkled, and bending forward she spoke to her horse in a low tone, gently touching his flanks with her switch. The game creature bounded forward with a wild snort, while the maiden laughed long and loudly at this unique race.

The jack-rabbit, like his more diminutive brother of the States, invariably resorts to one ruse in order to escape an enemy. It will flee for a considerable distance in a direct line, but then will "double," and return by a *detour* to near the starting-point.

And this one was not an exception to the general rule. For fully a mile it leaped ahead, with astonishing speed, leaving Clara far behind, and then doubled.

But Clara did not detect this last move, and urged her horse on at full speed. Then, however, having lost sight of the animal, she drew rein and turned as if to retrace her steps.

She glanced around, but the point toward which she believed was the camping-ground was bare and like that upon either hand. Not a tree was to be seen. The plain was nearly level, but she was now in a slight depression, that was from right to left, like the trough between two huge waves.

"Come," she said, as she twitched the reins and turned the mustang's head toward the crest, "we must hurry, or we'll be too late for supper. It's almost sundown."

But then, as she paused upon the ridge, a wild cry broke from her lips. A startling sight met her gaze.

Before her, at not more than one-half mile distance, were a number of horsemen, coming toward her at full speed. And even her untrained eyes could tell that they were Indians; their trappings and peculiar manner of riding, outlined upon the red sky beyond, as they crossed a slight swell, told her that.

"My God! I am lost!" gasped Clara, for she believed that these forms were directly between her and her friends, unknowing how the chase after the rabbit had caused her to deviate from a true line.

But then as a shrill cry came to her ears, borne over the intervening space by the light breeze, she wrenched her horse's head around and dashed down the slope at a break-neck pace. Only one thought possessed her now: to increase the distance between her and these dusky fiends, of whose daring she had heard so many frightful incidents.

And now the race was begun in sober earnest. It was no longer one of mere sport; freedom, perhaps even life depended upon her retaining the vantage-ground thus fortunately gained.

The truth may be told in a few words. These savages were but part of the band that had pursued old Tom Maxwell, who, after discovering the riderless horse, had suspected the ruse, and were searching for the emigrant train. They had caught sight of Clara, just after she set off in pursuit of the rabbit, and a band of them immediately spurred forth to effect her capture.

There was one circumstance in Clara's favor, though she did not think of it then. The sun had already sunk behind the western horizon, and in a short time more the shades of night

would hide her from her enemies, provided she could elude their clutches for so long.

But then she knew not whither she was going. Ignorant of what lay before her, in a strange and wild region, what hope was there for her?

Even supposing she should escape these enemies, how could she subsist in that wide prairie, destitute of food, or even the means of procuring any? She would only starve to death, die by slow degrees!

And thus she sped on, carefully assisting her noble horse, as he labored on. Fortunate indeed it was for her that he was a mustang, prairie born and bred; tough and hardy, though not remarkably fleet at a short stretch.

But one of this race will easily tire out and even kill one of the larger breed from the States, and yet, after a short rest and mouthful of short grass, be as well and fresh as ever. For hours they can be urged on at full speed, without giving way beneath the strain.

And so, though beneath the saddle well-nigh that entire day, Clara's horse sped on without flinching, and the maiden saw with joy that she was nearly, if not quite, maintaining her vantage ground.

But still, of what avail? How would it all end? She was fleeing further with each moment from her friends, and in trying to avoid one death, seemed but rushing upon another, scarcely less terrible.

For fully an hour the race swept on, without any great change in the relative positions. The shades of night were now upon the prairie, and the moon not yet having risen, all around was dark and gloomy.

Clara could see that she was nearing high ground, but as she looked to see if she could not skirt it, the dim outlines of a long range met her eye, extending for miles upon either hand. Though fearful of losing ground, there was nothing for it but to dare the steep ascent.

In a few minutes more, the fugitive was at the base of a rugged hill, and then as the shrill yells of exultation came up from the pursuers behind her, Clara urged her laboring horse up the steep ascent.

It was hard work for the already overtaken animal, but it nobly responded to the call, and although more than once stumbling, it struggled on until the extreme crest was gained. But then as it dashed down the steep declivity, the mustang's hoof rested upon a loose stone, and it pitched forward, headfirst, flinging its rider violently to the ground. Then arising, it still kept on, snorting wildly.

Clara felt a shock, then that she was falling—falling down what seemed an interminable depth, and then, with a frightful shock her downward course seemed to be checked. This, and then followed a blank.

A blank so far as any definite sensation was concerned, and yet not entirely one, either. For it seemed—faint and indistinct, as in a dream—as though she was shortly afterward surrounded by phantom figures, and a far-away hum as of human voices in consultation, was also in the vision, if vision it was.

The figures seemed to raise her from the ground and then convey her gently through the air, for what seemed an almost interminable length of time. Then she was placed upon the cool ground beside a murmuring rivulet, when cool water was sprinkled over her face, while warm, soft hands chafed her own.

Then with a feeble cry she started up and gazed wildly around her. The phantom forms were now more substantial—the voices sounded more clearly upon her ear, and she knew that the visionary dream had been a reality.

Then she uttered a feeble cry and sunk back, with a convulsive shudder. Before her she beheld a hideous face, dusky, it seemed, with nodding plumes surmounting it, that she knew could only belong to an Indian!

She felt that she was lost—that her pursuers had overtaken her, and that she was helpless in the power of the merciless fiends!

CHAPTER IV.

THE FORLORN HOPE.

"Do you think that Dusky Dick is with them, Maxwell?"

"I would sw'ar it, boss, ef that wasn't ag'in my natur'," promptly replied the old borderer, as he seated himself beside his loop-hole, and coolly began cutting a plug of tobacco into bits, to fill the pipe that he held in his mouth, as he spoke. "But I tell you he's *thar*. I didn't see him when those galoots was a'ter old Ebenezer,

but they was in a crowd, an' I didn't hev time to look good. But I kin *smell* him, now."

"Smell him!" echoed Calhoun, somewhat astonished at the positive tone of the old guide.

"Yas, sir," quoth Tom, cramming the tobacco into the pipe-bowl. "You know thar is sech a thing as *smell*, don't ye? Wal, then, one thing smells like somethin' else, an' then ag'in another *don't*. See?" selecting a match from a small pocket safe.

"You won't risk a light here, now, Tom?"

"No danger, boss, fer as you'll see, when I make a light, thar hain't a smich o' light to be see'd; that is, unless you look whar it is, an' then you won't see it, nuther," laying his old slouched hat upon the ground, over the handle of his knife.

Then he lay down, protruding his pipe-bowl beneath the hat, and striking a match, ignited the pipe without betraying a light larger than that of a glow-worm.

"You see, some things kin be did 's well 's others, ef so be you know jest how to do it. But as I was sayin', I kin smell that pesky varmint Dusky Dick. Dif'rent folks is dif'rent, you know, but then they're all alike, too, a'ter all. Now then thar's Miss Clary; she smells jest like a gre't big bun'le o' posies, figur'tively speakin', in course. Then thar's you—sorter like a persimming. Ef a feller bites you at the wrong time, why he'd a heap ruther squat down bar-legged onto a big ho'nets' nest than to do it ag'in. But ef the sign is right, then it's jest like b'iled honey, only more so. Then ag'in, funder an' more so, thar's Jack Wilson. He smells jest like a bottle o' pepper-sass. A leetle is mighty good, but ef you gits too much, why you're bound to sneeze an' go a-milkin'. So Dusky Dick smells like a copperhead or a rattler. I tell you he's *thar*, all ready for bitin', for I *smells 'im*," earnestly declared Maxwell, smoking vigorously.

"Look out yonder, Tom, where that little ridge of sand ends," suddenly whispered Calhoun, touching the old guide upon the shoulder. "What is that long, dark thing?"

After a moment's scrutiny of the suspicious-looking object, Maxwell replied:

"It looks su'thin' like a chunk out out o' a black cloud, don't it? Reckon 'tain't, though, come to think. Would be a Injun ef 'twasn't somethin' else. 'Sides, it's too big an' too long an' too much so all over for a red. 'Tain't a canoe, nuther, 'cause thar hain't no water thar. I'd go out an' ax its name, on'y I'm 'feered it'd rare up an' onsettles my supper," slowly drew the old guide, evidently talking from mere force of habit, without heeding what he said.

"It surely moves—see! It's closer now than when I first noticed it!" anxiously added Calhoun, nervously handling his rifle.

"Easy—easy, boss, or you'll skeer the durned thing so bad it'll run off, right spang-a-diddle through us," continued Tom, the while keenly eying the nondescript. "It *does* move, by gemently! but I don't see no legs, an' it ain't no sarpint, 'less it's swallowed its own head an' tail. Mebbe it's a whale?"

One of the emigrants now came up beside them and called their attention to a similar object at a little distance to the left, that had puzzled the others in the same manner.

"Good gracious, boss," exclaimed Tom in a vexed tone, "thar's jest the biggest set o' fools 'round these diggin's as was ever got together in one heap, I jest bet my pile! They was fools for thinkin' they could fool us with them, an' we was bigger fools or gittin' fooled by them dratted fool logs! It's the beatin'est foolery 'at I ever knowed!"

These words explained the mystery, and the others were as greatly surprised as had been the old scout, that they had not penetrated the ruse sooner.

The Indians had procured a number of logs, and were now busied in rolling them up toward the corral, evidently hoping to thus gain a position from whence they could securely pick off the defenders of the wagon-train at their own leisure.

"What is to be done now, Tom?" and the major could not entirely conceal his uneasiness as he spoke.

"Why, jest kill a dozen o' them loggerheads, an' then the others'll take the hint an' leave."

"But how?"

"Shoot 'em, in course. You don't s'pose they'll let you git cluss enough to do anythin' else, do ye?"

"But they're hid behind the logs."

"Ef they keeps hid all the time they won't do overly much damage a-shootin', shore. No, sir! When a feller shoots, his head hes got to be as high as the bar'l, an' ef it's atop o' the log, why

don't you see! his head must be thar too, in course, unless he's cross-eyed an' kin shoot roun' the corner," argued Tom.

"Then you mean to—?"

"I reckon. We'll try it, anyhow, jest for beans. You feller, go an' send Wilson an' Texas Joe here, quicker!"

In a few moments the two men designated were at hand, and then Maxwell directed them what to do. The logs were now within fifty yards of the outer wagons and were still drawing yet nearer, though slowly.

"Hunker down here, boys, an' see that you're well kivered. Ready! Now one o' you fire to'rds that log afore us. Don't make no differ' whether you aim at it or that big star yonder, jest so you shoot; an' then dodge down, quick."

The gun was discharged as directed at one of the stationary logs, and instantly there came a return shot, evidently aimed at this flash, for the bullet plowed up the dirt in close proximity to the men.

Then, like an echo the rifle of the guide spoke, and was blended with a wild yell of death-agony, that told it had not been discharged in vain, while a dark figure sprung high up into the air, and falling, lay motionless upon the ground out in the open moonlight.

"See, boss," exultantly cried Maxwell, rolling quickly aside from his loop-hole in time to avoid a return shot. "I told you 'at something could be did 's well 's others, an' now you see they kin, an' better, too!"

A chorus of vindictive hoots and cries announced that the enemy were anything but pleased at the working of their scheme, and then a general volley was fired from behind the logs.

This time a cry uprose from the interior of the corral and then the word was passed around that one of the men was killed. At this calamity—the first one of any importance—a heavy gloom settled over the spirits of the defenders, for they knew not but that ere the morning's sun should rise, they would all have met the same dread fate.

But their attention was speedily diverted from this sad thought, and their every energy required to avert the threatened doom. The cry went up that another onset was at hand.

With the never-failing yells and screeches, the foe sprung up from behind their coverts, and swarmed forward like so many phantoms of death; and then the air was filled with the hissing bullets and hurtling arrows.

As before, a dazzling line of flame shot along the entire length of the barricade, and so deadly was its effect that the desperate onslaught was momentarily checked. Only momentarily, though, and then there came a simultaneous shock against the outer row of wagons, as the assailants gained this shelter.

Then the enemies were separated by only a few feet, and for a few fast fleeting seconds there was a pause. It was broken, however, by a shot from the corral, and as an Indian uttered the death-shriek, his companions strove desperately to scale the barricade.

Did they reveal their persons to the keen eyes of the besieged, a bullet was speedily sent upon its deadly mission; did they essay to crawl beneath or over the wagons, they were met by pistol-shots, knife-thrusts or clubbed rifles.

Nor were the defenders unscathed. More than one still and ghastly form incumbered the interior of the corral, while here and there writhed one in mortal agony, shrieking aloud, but with fast weakening accents, the names of his loved ones; of those, who were even then, perchance, praying for his safety, that he might pass that terrific ordeal unharmed.

Although old Tom Maxwell and Major Calhoun were desperately busy, their voices were silent. There was little need of orders then, for each man was nobly doing his duty, and that lay plainly before him.

Then there came a loud shout from those men who were stationed close to the extremities of the barricade, so as to overlook the water's surface. A cry that announced some new peril threatening their safety; a cry that was echoed exultantly back by the demons in front, who now seemed to redouble their efforts to scale the barrier.

Maxwell quickly gained one end of the corral and beheld the river's surface above their position, as well as directly in front, close to the water's edge, dotted with sundry black objects that needed but one glance to be recognized as logs, bearing the firearms of savages, who were evidently sheltered behind them, but at the same time drawing nearer to their anticipated prey.

Those who exposed themselves first on going to the shore, were instantly saluted with a deadly volley of pistol-balls, and for a brief space the others hesitated, as if disconcerted. They had evidently counted upon effecting an entrance into the corral by surprise, while the emigrants were engaged in repelling the attack of the main body, and then overpowering their obstinate foes, but the forethought of the veteran guide had balked them.

Then rallying, they made a desperate rush, gaining the shore, and several of them actually gaining the bank, entering the corral, only to be hurled back, dead or dying, into the water. For a brief space it was a wild, horrible *melee*, desperate and bloody.

The report of fire-arms—the occasional ringing of steel against steel, as two foemen met in close contest—the confused tramping to and fro—the shrill yell, either of rage or else of death-agony; the defiant shouts and hoarse oaths—the affrighted screams of the snorting horses—or the wail of some terrified infant, all combined into one fearful tumult!

Then there came a long-drawn, quivering cry, and as if by magic the savage assailants vanished, like hoar-frost before the sun's warm breath.

But there followed no exultant shout from the emigrants.

As they glanced fearfully around upon the forms of their dead and dying comrades, their hearts were rent with anguish and apprehension. They saw but too plainly that another such triumph would be almost equivalent to a defeat.

While the majority still retained their posts, keenly vigilant, others of the little band removed the dead into one place and ministered to the wants of the wounded, to the best of their ability.

It was a sad and heart-rending task, but their own peril was such that they had no time for bemoaning their comrades' sad fate, and then once more they returned to their posts.

For nearly an hour all was silence within the little corral, and even the sorely wounded, despite their agony, heroically suppressed their moans of pain, lest they should tend to weaken the nerves of the defenders still left. And the latter were far too deeply occupied with their own thoughts upon the impending peril to feel like conversing.

But, at the end of this time, there was one who could maintain silence no longer—the old guide, Tom Maxwell. A voluble talker, he seemed totally at a loss while his tongue was idle, and unlike most people, he appeared to think better and more closely while dilating upon some entirely foreign subject.

Upon one side of him was stationed Major Calhoun; upon the other a young man, Buenos Ayres. It was with them, either or both, that he spoke.

"Wuss'n a Quaker meetin', this is, 'specially a'ter sich lively doin's as was jist now. 'Pears like I'd bu'st ef I was to hold in any longer—the words scrouge each other so 't they hain't got room to kick in. What d'you think o' the sitiv'ation, anyhow, boss?"

"It's bad—very bad," gloomily responded Calhoun.

"That's true as gospil; but then 'tain't quite so bad as it mou't be ef it was wuss, anyhow, which is a gre't consolation. I thought I was once in the wuss fix 'at ever could be hatched up, when I was in the middle o' a bayou, down in Texas, with a passel o' red-skins on 'ither hand, an' three in a canoe cluss behind me. But then a corn-twisted alligator poked his nose right up from the water against mine, which mixed things up a little more so."

"But I div!—the canoe ran smack inside the critter's mouth—thar was a scrunch, an' then mebbe thar wasn't some splashin'! I swum in 'mongst the reeds, while the reds was frustrated, an' so fooled 'em. All of which goes to prove that we ain't cotched yit."

"Are you sure that Dusky Dick is with these devils to-night? I have neither seen nor heard him."

"Bet yer life he is. But he ain't nobody's fool, an' knows well enough that ef he should show his ugly mug, it'd bring a dozen bullets a'ter it. Most like, he's painted up like one o' the rest; but he's *thar*, shure—I smell him, I tell ye."

"You never heard tell o' two sech attacks as them, right tergether, 'thout somebody hed a partic'lar grudge to work out, or object to gain. 'Tain't Injun nature, it ain't. Most like they're a gang o' outcasts an' vaggabonds as he's picked up somewhars to do this dirty work, an' this 'ere ain't the *first* time, nuther, you

mark me. No wonder he's called an unlucky guide fer the trains," added Maxwell significantly, and then he proceeded once more to fill his pipe.

"I had hoped he was not with them, for then I should not feel so uneasy about the result. I think we can beat them off once more, anyhow, and if they were only after plunder, their loss would soon sicken them. But if he is there, I fear the worst," added Calhoun thoughtfully.

"Jest so; you talk right to the spot, you do—after my own style. Never did fancy them fellers what jabbered so much 'mongst sech a heap o' words; 't stands to reason thar must be some lyin'; an' I hate a liar like all ge-mently—I do so!"

"It was a sad mistake, our leaving the regular trail," observed young Ayres.

"As it turns out, yes; but 'twas fer the best then. Water's scarce on that route this dry weather. We did it fer the best. But why so?"

"Because we might hope for help from some other train. As it is, we're too far off for them to hear the fuss."

"Yas; thar ears hain't long enough. Ketch a lot o' jack-rabbits an' choage 'th 'em. Mules, too. Lord, yas!"

"Why, Maxwell, what do you mean?" and Calhoun gazed anxiously at the old scout, whose eyes appeared fixed intently upon a bright star, while a vacant stare rested upon his countenance.

"Don't—let him alone, major," whispered Buenos. "He don't know he's talking. I believe he sees some way to fool these devils, and is settling the details."

And such was indeed the case. The words of Ayres had given a hint to the quick-witted guide, that he was not slow to take hold of. From mere force of habit, his tongue shaped words of which he was unconscious.

"Thar! I've got it! We'll fool the imps yit, by ge-mineezers! That is, we will ef we do; an' ef we don't why, we will, anyhow. No use talkin'—we *must* do it," and the guide uttered a deep sigh of relief, as he glanced, first at one, then at the other, of his companions.

"Do what? What do you mean, Tom?"

"Lis'en. I said we'd fool them imps, an' I b'lieve we kin do it. I don't say we kin, *fer shora*, but I think so. A feller *mustn't*—"

"But your plan—what is it?" impatiently interrupted Calhoun. "There is no time to lose."

"Thar's another day a-comin', boss," coolly added Maxwell, his tones telling that his mind was still busied with the details of his plan. "No need to be in a hurry. Know'd a feller to *die*, one't, 'cause he was in too big a hurry. Got lost thar—tarved to death afore he could find his way out. Thar, it's *did*—now listen."

"Fust, we're here—*they're* thar, an' somebody else is in t'other place. We must find that t'other somebody. See?" hastily spluttered Maxwell.

"But *how*?"

"You member the train we left at Dutchman's Crick—the sojer one? It couldn't travel much faster 'n we did, so it must be not very fur away now, on t'other trail. We must get word to them. Now for t e *how*."

"One o' us—a volunteer ef thar is one—ef not, I'll try it—must drop over thar in the drink, an' swim down ontel he kin git out 'thout the reds seein' him. Then he must putt out, hot fut, an' not stop fer nothin' ontel he strikes t'other trail. Then ef the big train hes goad by, he must ketch up 'th it. Ef not, then he must go t'other way ontel he finds it. That did, he'll tell o' our sition an' bring help—twenty sojers 'll do, 'th what we hev here. See?"

"But can the trail be found, Tom? Won't whoever attempts it, get lost?"

"Thar's the no'the star—he kin keep that on his right shoulder. He *can't* miss it—the trail runs from eend to eend—unless he goes t'other way. You stay here, an' I'll go see what the boys say 'bout it."

"No need of that, I will make the venture," said Buenos, calmly.

"You—no, lad. I'd rather go myself. It'll be resky—no two to one, a feller'll git through. Think o' Miss Clary," earnestly responded Maxwell.

"I do—I have. She is lost, and every moment let go by, but adds to the danger of our never finding her. The sooner we are free to search for her, the better her chances are. I will not lose any time, and the thought that I am working for her, will help me through."

"He is right, Tom," answered Calhoun. "He can do this as well as you can, and besides, he can hardly fill your place here. We need some one who is up to the dodges of the red devils, or we are lost indeed. You must stay."

"You're right, but I don't like it. Still, it may be best. I'd rather trust him than any other one as would go, now Texas Joe is rubbed out."

"Have you any further instructions to give?" asked Ayres, as he tightened the belt around his waist.

"No—on'y take keer o' yourself. Member that the life o' the bull pack o' us—and mebbe that o' Miss Clary, too—depends on your gittin' through all hunky. It'd be too late to try a-nother one, ef you—thunder! you *won't* git rubbed out! Ef you do, durned ef I don't jest up an' swaller every pesky red-skin out yender, alive, an' then send Dusky Dick down ater, to keep 'em stirred up lively. I will so!"

"Well then, I'll go now. I wouldn't tell the boys how it is, till you know whether I get through safe or not."

"Leave your rifle here—tie a 'volver on top o' your head, so it'll be dry an' ready fer use, ef you should chaine to run ag'in' any o' the varmints. Swim cluss to the bank, whar it throws a shadder, an' take your time ontel you git a safe distance. Then let your legs went. Don't stop to look ef you're goin' to tread on any bug or nuttin'—let 'em squish ef they don't git outen the way. Understand?"

"Yes. Good-by."

"Good-by, and God bless and protect you, my boy," uttered Calhoun, chokingly.

"Thar—git out! You've filled my eyes full o' bugs or so'thin' a'ready. Ef the reds come now I couldn't shoot a mite. Thar—now you're gone," and the old guide pressed the young man's hand warmly, while he brushed one sleeve across his eyes, now dimmed by a suspicious moisture.

Cautiously Ayres glided along the barricade, and slipping down the bank—here several yards high—entered the water. Then sinking low down, and keeping within the narrow belt of dark shadow, he slowly floated down-stream, fairly bound upon his truly perilous mission.

And with painfully-throbbing hearts the two men listened, dreading lest there should come to their ears with each passing moment, the exultant shout of their savage foes, announcing the discovery of the young man, thus foiling their last hope—a truly forlorn one!

CHAPTER V.

RED-SKIN TOM.

CLARA uttered a wild cry, and sunk back, with a shudder. She believed her pursuers had overtaken, and now held her captive; but in this she was mistaken.

"Do not be alarmed, lady," uttered a low voice close beside the maiden. "You are among friends here, who will protect you with their lives, if there be any need."

"But he—he is an Indian!" half unconsciously murmured Clara.

"True, but he is far different from those who were chasing you. He is a true friend, and would fight in your defense quite as readily as I would."

"Bes' git back little funder. Injun shoot plenty straight by dis light. Ketch boss—den be back, bumbye. Bes' hide in bushes up dere, den Injun go by—won't see um," interrupted a guttural voice, evidently proceeding from the lips of the Indian alluded to.

"You're right, Red-skin. They'll be apt to follow back on their own trail, to see where she gave them the slip. Do you think you can walk, miss?" he added, turning toward Clara; "or shall I carry you? There is danger in lingering here."

"Thank you—I will walk. If you lend me your arm I think—Ah!"

Clara rose to her feet by clinging to the strong arm of her new-found friend, but then, with an agonized groan, she would have fallen to the ground had not his arms encircled her fainting form. The violent fall had evidently injured the maiden far more severely than she had at first believed.

"Lead the way, Tom," muttered the man, as he raised the girl in his arms. "Quick!"

The Indian turned and glided along the level plat for a few yards, then began ascending a steep incline. Up this for a considerable distance; then he paused before a dense growth of bushes, that seemed to shoot out from the very face of the bank.

The man bearing Clara was quickly beside his red companion, and then they all entered the bushes, disappearing from sight.

This spot was upon a hillside, at whose base ran a clear stream of water. Beyond this, again, was a level strip of ground, studded thickly with little clumps of trees and undergrowth.

The three persons were ensconced within the bushes, close against the rocks, that uprose, bare and gray, for nearly a dozen yards, sloping so that a stone dropped from the escarpment above, would touch the ground several yards out from the base. This cliff, however, only extended for a short distance upon either hand; then it ran out into a steep hillside, down which, on one hand, Clara had been cast by the stumbling of her horse.

"How do you feel now?" asked the white man, after a moment's rest.

"Better, though still faint and dizzy. But how—I remember falling, and then all is blank. How did you find me, and where am I? There were some Indians chasing me; where are they?" confusedly asked Clara, in a faint tone.

In a few, quick words the stranger explained the part he had played in the adventure.

He was an officer of a Government train of supplies, and had started out on a scout, together with one of their guides, a Delaware Indian named Red-skin Tom, but had become belated while following up a trail. They had related to encamp for the night, when they were aroused by wild yells and the sound of hoof-strokes.

Then they saw a woman rise the hill's crest, and almost immediately fall from her horse, as it stumbled. He sprung forward and caught her, while Red-skin Tom crept to the hill-top to learn what had so alarmed her.

He soon made out the figures of the pursuing savages, and then the two scouts had hidden in the bushes, with the unconscious maiden, until the war-party had thundered by, in hot pursuit of the riderless horse. Then they had hastened with Clara to the creek, where they succeeded in restoring her to consciousness, by the plentiful use of water, aided by a stronger fluid incased in a flask carried by the captain.

And then Clara briefly detailed her portion of the adventure, adding:

"If I do not thank you for this service, it is because I cannot find words to express my feelings. I would rather die than fall into *their* power!"

"Thanks are not needed, believe me. I am amply repaid already for the trifle I was enabled to do, by knowing you are safe from those fiends. But you spoke of your father—is it possible that he is my old commandant, Major John Calhoun?"

"He served in Mexico, and his given name is John."

"It must be the same, then! Did you never hear him speak of Harold Travers? He saved my life at Cerro Gordo," eagerly added the captain.

"Indeed I have; he often mentions your name. And now you repay that debt by saving the life of his daughter. He has often wondered where you were, and it will be a happy meeting; one that I trust will take place very soon."

"Bes' not mek talk now," interrupted Red-skin Tom, significantly. "Rapahoe he come back plenty soon. Find boss—mad like de debble 'cause don't fin' squaw, too. Hunt fo' her heap, mebbe. Won't git her, dough, 'less kin whip us."

"You're right, Red-skin. I can hear the sound of their horses' hoofs on the rocks."

"Are they coming? My God! I thought I had escaped them for good!" moaned Clara, fearfully.

"Have no fear, Miss Calhoun," returned Travers. "They shall not harm you, even if they chance to discover us. There are only half a dozen in all, and surely we two can manage them. Can't we, Red-skin?"

"Yeb, fo' sure. Don't know much how mek fight, Rapahoe. Big cowards, dey is. Got white man 'long, dough."

"Are you sure, Tom?"

"See um. Know um, too. Name Dusky Dick. Big decoy. White Injins—plenty bad—more so dan oders. Play snake fo' train, so Injin git 'em," tersely added the Delaware.

Clara uttered a faint cry of apprehension at the sound of his name, for she knew that now indeed she was in danger. The threats of Dusky Dick came back to memory with renewed force, and knowing, as he must, that she was astray in the mountains, he would spare no pains in order to make his word's good.

"I see you know him, too; but never mind now. We must not converse any more. See! the devils are in sight, down yonder by the creek."

Cautiously peering through the leafy screen before them, the three could just distinguish the faint, shadowy outlines of a number of horse-

men down in the valley. These soon crossed the creek, and then one being left in charge of the horses, the rest—six in number—dismounted, and began quartering over the ground, like hounds searching for a lost scent.

The soldier tightly compressed his lips, and grasped his rifle with deadly determination. He saw that the enemy had evidently divined the manner in which their anticipated victim had escaped them—at least in part—and believed she was still hiding in some place in the vicinity.

It was not probable they were aware of the presence of other foes in the neighborhood, else they would have displayed more caution. Evidently they believed Clara had abandoned her failing horse, and sought safety by lying in concealment.

The moonlight was too faint and uncertain for the savages to learn aught from a trail upon the rocky ground, and that fact was in favor of the fugitives. Still, there could be no denying that they were in imminent peril of their lives.

The Arapahoes scattered and began a close and systematic search of the ground, peering behind each boulder, into every bush and cranny where a human form might possibly have sought refuge. The six were widely scattered, the better to compass their purpose.

Upon the movements of one of the savages in particular, was the attention of the three friends riveted. He alone of the party was in close proximity to the hidden prey.

He was a large, brawny warrior, and was now gliding along the hill-side, gradually approaching the covert of our friends, carefully scrutinizing every yard of ground as he proceeded. Presently he paused and glanced keenly around him. Then his piercing gaze rested fairly upon the line of bushes that screened the base of the cliff.

His tall, muscular frame, drawn rigidly erect, in all the pride of war-paint and plumes, looked grandly terrible in the glimmering moonlight, and even the eyes of Red-Skin Tom emitted a momentary gleam of admiration as they dwelt upon the perfect figure. But then this gave place to a glare of deadly hatred as if he recognized a bitter personal enemy in the warrior.

The Arapahoe stood thus for a moment, and then began gliding up the hill-side, his eyes seeming to pierce through and through the screen, so keen was their glance. He saw that this was a good cover, and believed or hoped that the fugitive had taken refuge there.

Travers crouched down and drew his revolver, with a stern demeanor, but a light touch upon his shoulder caused him to turn his head. The Delaware made a peculiar gesture, and then hissed:

"No shoot—mek too much noise. Let Delaware tek him. Know um—he Kisch-kouch—big t'ief—me kill him heap sure. Tom'hawk mek no noise."

"You're right, Tom, I forgot," muttered Travers, below his breath; and then fearing to say more, they watched the red-skin's progress in perfect silence.

The Arapahoe did not pause, but kept on until he could touch the bushes with his outstretched hand. Evidently he did not dream of danger to himself, for he believed the fugitive maiden was alone.

Then he reached out and parted the bushes. This he did at a point some yards to the left of where the trio were concealed, and a grunt of disappointment broke from his lips, as he discovered nothing but bare rocks.

Then he moved nearer, parting the bushes at each step, steadily nearing those which concealed the three friends. His hand rested upon them, and then they were gently pressed aside.

Red-Skin Tom was prepared for this move, and as the moonlight shot into the aperture his uplifted hand fell, clutching the heavy tomahawk, whose keen edge alighted fairly upon the bowed crest of the savage. The blow was delivered with a sure aim, and was deadly in its effects; but, as the left hand of Red-Skin Tom shot out to clutch the throat of the Arapahoe, to check an outcry, the stricken savage bounded back and uttered his thrilling death-cry. This was done so quickly that it could not be prevented.

But, ere the lifeless body could touch the ground, it was seized by the Delaware and pushed into the bushes. For a moment all was still—only for a moment, however, for then the comrades of the slaughtered brave took up the yell, and echoed it long and loud, as they intuitively drew together, in wondering alarm. They well knew it was a cry from death-stricken

lips, but what had caused it, or from what direction it had come, they knew not.

The cry had echoed through the hills, sounding from several different points, and no two of the party could agree upon which one was the right. A glance told them that one of their number was missing—the best and bravest warrior among them all.

They were within fair view of the spot where the brave had met his death, although, of course, ignorant of that fact, and had the fugitives deemed it prudent, they could easily have sent a brace of rifle-bullets into the little crowd. But, as long as the savages did not molest them, Travers was willing to do likewise, now that a helpless woman was under his protection.

Though he did not greatly fear the result of the collision with the six, he did not deem it prudent to invite such, under the circumstances. A random shot might work incalculable harm.

Clara shuddered convulsively as a peculiar sound met her ear, from where Red-Skin Tom was crouched. She knew he was scalping the dead brave, although she could not see the action, as the thick-matted screen of bushes effectually shut out the light of the moon.

With a grunt of satisfaction, Red-Skin Tom affixed the reeking trophy to his girdle, and then turned toward the soldier. Side by side, they peered out upon their foes in the valley.

"Big fools plenty skeered," chuckled Red-Skin, as he noted the irresolute air of the enemy. "Little more mek 'um run like de debble. S'pose shoot one, two time, dey run 'way off. Git scalp, too. Kin hit 'um from dis," he added, eagerly fingering his rifle as though longing to begin the affray.

"No, Tom, you mustn't do it. It would not be safe. Were we alone, I wouldn't care how soon you began it, but now we have another to look out for, besides ourselves. She might get hurt."

The Delaware did not reply, but he was evidently dissatisfied. He had tasted blood, and it had aroused all the worst passions of his half-tamed nature.

The savages appeared to be undecided as to the course best for them to pursue, and for several minutes conversed earnestly together, closely watched by their hidden foes. Then there was a decided move on the part of the former. One of their number moved toward the horses, and, mounting, rode rapidly off up the valley, soon disappearing from view.

Travers and Tom exchanged glances. Right well they divined the meaning of this move, and it evidently caused them not a little uneasiness.

"He's gone after help," muttered the soldier.

"Yeh. Dat's it. S'pose we stay here, den dey ketch us all, same like buff'lo. S'pose we don't like dat, den we mus' git 'way, 'fore dey gits back ag'in. Dat right, eh?"

"Yes; we must make a move. Surely we can manage those fellows, yonder. If we do, and can catch some of the horses, we can ride back to camp to-night. But how shall we do it, Tom?"

"Stop—me t'ink a little. Plenty time—no hurry," and Red-Skin Tom appeared deeply buried in thought.

CHAPTER VI.

TOM MAXWELL TURNS INDIAN.

MAJOR CALHOUN and Tom Maxwell "listened with all their ears," for a sound they fervently hoped would never come—the wild yells of exultation telling that their messenger had been captured by the Indians, and the dissipation of their last hope.

And thus they remained for several minutes, without a sound to greet their hearing, save the usual ones of the night. But then, just as they were congratulating themselves upon the complete success of the venture, their blood was fairly curdled and their hearts wrung by a startling alarm.

From some distance came the noise, then arose a wild tumult and outcry, as of human voices, the owners of which were engaged in a bitter struggle for life and death. And then from the prairie around the beleaguered train, there sounded the shrill cries and signals of the aroused warriors, followed by the rapid tread of several horses in full gallop, all tending toward the point below, where had first sounded the alarm.

"My God! Tom, the boy is lost!" groaned Calhoun, agonizedly, as he sunk back and covered his face with his hands.

"I'm feared he is, boss, but look up. Don't give way now, jest when we need our wits the wust. What's did is did, an' can't be ondid, nuther. Think o' the rest—o' Miss Clara—an'

'member ef we go under, so'll she, 'thout a doubt. Ha! look—they're comin'!" he added, suddenly, as several figures appeared in view upon the prairie beyond. "Look out, boys—gi' the pesky imps a little thunder, jest to let 'em know what they've got to expect hereafter!"

As he yelled these words, Maxwell discharged his rifle at a prominent Indian, who suddenly paused in his onward career, tottered for a moment, then fell heavily forward upon his face. And along the line of smoke-begrimed wagons there was another flash, like those which had preceded it, with a like deadly effect.

But the one volley was all that was needed, for then the savages appeared to melt away and disappear from view. This had evidently been no concerted assault, but the red-skins had rushed forward alarmed by the tumult below, no doubt fearing their intended prey were attempting to escape by way of the river.

When the temporary confusion had in a measure subsided, the two men listened anxiously for some sound from below, to tell them of the probable fate of their messenger, but all was still. The event had evidently decided, in one way or another, during the brief assault.

And they naturally dreaded the worst. The first yells told them that Buenos Ayres had been discovered, and had been engaged in a death-struggle with the enemy. He could scarcely have escaped.

"Now we are indeed lost," bitterly uttered Calhoun, to the old guide.

"It looks dub'ous—durned dub'ous, I must say. But then mebbe 'tain't so bad as it looks. We may fool 'em yit. It's my turn, now," added Tom, with a sudden increase of confidence.

"What? you would not be foolish enough to attempt that! They will be watching the river so close after this that a fish could scarcely pass their lines. It would be suicide, man!"

"Jest so; ef I tried it—which I don't 'tend doin'. No, sir, I ain't sech a fool—yit!"

"Then what do you intend doing?"

"Walkin' out thar an' j'inin' them imps," coolly returned Maxwell.

"There is no time for fooling, Tom. Our situation is far too serious to admit of that. Such a move would be even worse than the other."

"Not much. Anyhow, I'm goin' to try it. They cain't do much more'n kill a feller, anyhow, an' ef we stay here they're bound to do it, shore. So what matter? I'm goin' out thar, an' they hain't a goin' to hurt me, nuther," confidently added the scout.

"But how—what do you mean?" asked Calhoun, seeing that his companion was undoubtedly in earnest in what he said.

"I'm goin' to turn Injun for a bit, jest to see how that pesky Dusky Dick must feel. But don't talk. Watch the prayrie cluss—watch fer both on us, fer I cain't do my shar' now."

The old scout left the side of the puzzled soldier, and glided toward a pile of dead savages, who had been carelessly heaped together, after the second assault, so as to clear the way. These comprised all those who had fallen inside the corral.

As he rudely turned these over with his foot, Tom uttered a grunt of approval, and then catching one of the dead braves by the arm, he dragged it to the spot where crouched Calhoun.

"What are you going to do with that, Tom?"

"Goin' to skin it, fust. Then putt on the hide an' walk out yender an' tell those imps as how I was dead, but hev come to life ag'in," chuckled the old guide.

Calhoun uttered an exclamation of disgust.

"Don't git huffy, now, boss, 'cause I speak sorter mixed-up like. You know my way, or had orter by this time. But lis'en an' you'll see what I mean. You see this 'ere carr'on is—or was, I'd orter say, mebbe, seein' as he's dead—a Delaware Injun. That proves what I said 'bout Dusky Dick's bevin' picked up a band of runnygades to do his dirty work, fer thar is 'Raphoe, Cheyenne, Pawnee, an' Delaware 'mongst them dead critters over yon."

"Now I kin jabber a little o' most all o' them, but better Delaware, fer as you may know, I hed one—Red-Skin Tom they called the cuss—fer a pardner, well-nigh two years. So as the lad—durn the luck!—hes got rub—in-ter trouble I mean, an' cain't go fer help, why I 'termined to try an' sneak through them imps thar. I knowed thar was no use tryin' to play the runnygade as he did, fer the imps'll be on the keen look-out thar, an' this was the only chance. An' a durned slim one, too, but better'n stayin' here."

"We will try, but I fear 'tis a hopeless case. If they make another steady rush, we must go

down before it. If we do, and you get free. Tom, promise me one thing: that you'll not forget Clara? You'll hunt for her?"

"No, I won't, nuther."

"What!"

"Jest so. Give a fool answer for a fool question, is my motto, al'ays. Ain't I a man—a white man, too, ef so be you rub a little o' the outside dirt off? Then in course I'll do it—I ain't a dog nor nothin', I reckon. But don't fret. We'll all hunt together. I'll git you free. See ef I don't, now."

As he spoke, the old guide glided toward the river, accompanied by Calhoun. But as he hung his legs over the edge of the bank, Maxwell suddenly added:

"Look here—ef you see or hear a feller shoot this-a-way, from out thar, nigh to the river, don't you shoot back, onless you aim at that big star, yonder. Mought hurt somebody, ef you did. He's a powerful poor shooter, that fellow 'll be, when he minds to. Shouldn't wonder ef he'll miss the bull intire train, wagons an' all," chuckled Tom.

"You mean you'll fire from there?"

"Yas. Must throw dust in the red-skins' eyes, ye see, or else they'll come on 'em be snoopin' 'round to see who I be, which moughtn't be pleasant. Ef they see me a shootin' this-a-way, they'll natur'ly s'pose it's one o' themselves, slid out to play a lone hand. See?"

"Yes—I understand."

"Then keep my rifle. I cain't han'le it the way I must go; 'volvers must sarve me. But don't let nobody tetch it. I'd be plum lost ef anythin' was to happen to it; I would so!"

Then Maxwell slid down into the water, that here was but little over knee-deep, and crouching low down he glided rapidly up the river, bound upon a mission that could scarcely succeed, now that the enemy had their eyes opened by a somewhat similar attempt. And once more Calhoun went back to his post, with a heavy gloom resting upon his heart.

Tom stealthily pursued his way up stream until he was fully a hundred yards above the corral, when he gained the spot for which he had aimed. This was a little depression that ran from the water's edge, some few yards into the level prairie.

Here he hesitated for a moment. He glanced along in the direction he had been pursuing, and debated earnestly in his own mind whether it would not be better for him to keep on, and by thus rounding the bill, avoid a probable meeting with those beleaguering the corral.

But this hesitation lasted only for a moment. He saw that the contemplated change was now impossible. That the savages had guarded against any such attempt upon the part of their intended victims.

His keen eye caught sight of several dusky figures that he felt assured were none other than Indians, who had been detailed to guard the stream above. And this was not all.

He also saw enough of their movements to tell that he was discovered; that his progress had not been so cautiously made as to escape the prying eyes of his enemies. A quiver agitated his frame, and for a moment his heart was sick within him.

Not with personal fear, however. There could scarcely be found one who was more utterly reckless of his own life than this same guide. For nearly twoscore years he had lived with his life in his hand. At dawn he knew not whether he would ever again look upon the setting sun.

And all this had rendered him utterly reckless and devoid of fear, so far as he was concerned alone. But now he had others to think of and work for. Upon the success of this venture probably hung the lives of the entire company of emigrants. Were he slain or captured, he believed that ere the sun arose all would be over; that his friends would be swept from the face of the earth.

For a moment he half resolved to spring to his feet and dash swiftly away over the plain, trusting to his great endurance and fleetness of foot to escape. But then this idea was as quickly discarded.

He knew that such an action would but too surely betray his identity, and that a cry would be raised and immediate pursuit instituted. Pursuit, too, upon horseback; fleet though he undeniably was, and long of wind, he could not hope to cope successfully with the fiery, half-wild mustangs, especially when bestrode by those rare jockeys, the prairie Indians.

Maxwell resolved upon a bold course of action; or rather fell back upon the old plan. Its success mainly depended upon one thing.

How long had the red-skins been watching

him? Had they observed his leaving the interior of the corral? If so, then his fate was indubitably sealed.

But had they only noted him recently—as he hoped; for he had been careful to keep low down within the dense shadow of the bank of the river, where the moon's rays could not reach him—he thought he might yet succeed in deceiving them. And upon this hope he acted.

With one glance behind him at the dim, phantom-like figures that were still stealthily approaching him, Maxwell emerged from the hollow upon the side toward the corral, and, upon his hands and knees, began crawling quite rapidly toward the wagon-train. Then he dropped down quite flat upon his face, casting a glance behind him as he did so.

The red-skins in pursuit had just crossed the ditch and were crawling after him. They had gained rapidly in the last few minutes, and their dress, as well as weapons, could now quite plainly be seen.

Then Tom leveled his revolver toward the corral, and taking care to aim above it, so that the bullet could by no possibility inflict harm upon any of his friends, he fired. Almost like an echo, there came a return shot from the train, and Tom fairly chuckled with delight.

This was just what he had hoped for, though he feared Calhoun would not risk a shot, knowing the circumstances, at least in part. But now, nothing could be better calculated to allay any suspicion the red-skins behind him might have entertained.

Tom glanced backward beneath one arm. To his delight he saw that the Indians had paused, and were now closely hugging the ground, evidently trying to lessen the mark their bodies presented, lest a bullet from the corral should bury itself beneath their precious hides.

"Ef that much works so well, reckon I'll go a leetle furdur 'th it, though it'd jist be partic'lar ge-mineezers ef some o' the boys should shoot me fer a red. But I reckon the boss'll look out fer that. Anyhow, I must shake off them pesky imps. Let ary one o' them git a glimpse o' my mug, an' it'll be all night 'th this coon, shore!" muttered the old guide, as he gradually worked himself still nearer the corral.

This move, though not a little hazardous to himself, had the desired effect, and as he once more glanced back, Tom saw that his red-skinned followers had retreated and were hidden from view. He now fired again, and while reloading the empty chambers, he busied himself by peering keenly around him to discover, if possible, some point through which he could pass with the least delay, and consequently peril, to himself and his important mission.

He dared not dally long, for the night was rolling on apace, and he must be miles away from this spot ere the sun arose above the eastern hill-tops. Then, with sternly-compressed lips and finely-strung nerves, he started anew upon his errand.

He turned, and still crouching far down, with head bowed so that the dried grass was blended with his hair and long beard, completely hiding his features, he glided slowly away from the corral, shaping his course so as to carry himself to one side of the main body of Indians, as he calculated.

Already a chuckle of delight was tickling his throat as he saw how finely he was progressing, for he believed that his ruse would succeed, when an incident occurred which changed his exultation to angry apprehension.

From a dense mass of dried grass, almost directly in his path, there uprose the figure of a stalwart savage, who had doubtless been observing the scout's movements. He was now so close that Maxwell could not avoid him without exciting suspicion, which would bring with it investigation and consequent discovery.

So he kept on in his course, that would carry him a few feet to one side of the Indian. But the other did not seem disposed to allow his seeming ally and brother to pass by unquestioned.

He spoke in a harsh voice that also expressed suspicion. The words were uttered in the Arapahoe dialect, with which Tom was sufficiently conversant to comprehend their purport. But he well knew that this knowledge was not perfect enough to carry him through a conversation with a native undetected, and so he replied in Delaware:

"I am wounded. The accursed pale-faces saw me, as I crept up out yonder to try and kill them, and shot me. The bullet made me sick," he said in a husky tone.

"Where were you going?" demanded the other, also using the dialect.

"I was hunting the medicine-grass," added

Tom, fearing to lose any more time, and again crawling forward.

"Stop! Let me see your hurt. I may stop the blood, and then I will find the grass for you," added the Arapahoe in a kind voice, evidently swallowing the lie, and feeling no further suspicion concerning the identity of his seeming ally.

And then, in the kindness of his heart, he strode forward and placed his hand upon the disguised scout's head. The act was a fatal one; the fastenings of the grass head dress became unloosened, and the mass came off in the Indian's hand.

A wild cry broke from the red-skin's lips, as the bright moonlight fell fully upon the features of the guide. There could be no possibility of mistaking them for other than those of a white man.

But that cry was his last upon earth; for, with an angry howl of furious rage, Tom Maxwell sprung erect and grappled with his foe. His powerful arms bore the savage to the ground like an infant, while his hands were clasped tightly around his throat.

As they fell heavily to the ground, the warrior appeared to recover from his surprise, and struggled desperately for dear life. His arms were wound around the scout's body with crushing pressure, and he writhed like a wounded snake in the endeavor to turn his foe.

Tom dared not relax his grasp upon the throat of the Arapahoe, lest he should cry out and give the alarm to bring an overwhelming force upon him; then his fate would be assuredly sealed. And thus he could only try to throttle his enemy in time to flee from the spot before any other should be alarmed by the struggle.

For several seconds this continued; but then, to his horror, Tom heard a wild cry, and then the rapid rush of many feet, plainly coming toward him. He knew that the savages were alarmed, and had caught sight of the struggling foemen.

With a howl of rage, he freed one hand and drew his knife. Then it glowed for a brief instant in the bright moonlight before falling with a heavy *thud*, sinking to its very haft in the broad chest of the Indian.

But still, even in the throes of death, those muscular arms held him firmly, despite Maxwell's efforts to break the grip. With a desperate effort Tom sprung to his feet, lifting with him the dead man, whose horribly-convulsed features stared him full in the face.

Then with a fierce curse Tom wrenched free, and made a step forward as if to flee. But he was too late.

The enemy were upon him, and the tall scout was cast heavily to the ground, with a dozen hands clutching him. A brief, furious struggle, and the savages arose, while the counterfeit Indian lay beside the body of his dead foe, a helpless captive.

CHAPTER VII.

A TANGLED TRAIL.

BUENOS AYRES had not overestimated the danger and peril that would attend his effort to pass by the vigilant red-skin on his journey toward the Main Trail in quest of help for the beleaguered emigrants.

And then, under the circumstances, he was about the last person who should have been chosen as the forlorn hope, although he was undeniably brave, and usually keen-witted and far-seeing. But now these latter qualities were in a measure overpowered by the anxiety he felt to perform his mission with the least delay possible, in order that a thorough and systematic search might be made for the missing maiden, Clara Calhoun, and to this desire he sacrificed prudence and caution to a degree nearly fatal.

He swam rapidly down-stream, though the water was not waist-deep, but in this manner he could proceed more silently than by wading. He lay low down in the water, that he might present a less fair mark for prying eyes to rest upon, and, hidden in the shadow, he believed that he could succeed in passing the lines of the enemy unseen.

In this manner he had gained the edge of the timber before mentioned, that extended nearly to the verge of the river bank. But then he suddenly paused in his advance.

Before him lay something dark, evidently resting in or upon the water, and at only a few yards' distance. For a moment Buenos believed that this was the head of a man, whose body—like his own—was covered in the water.

But then a movement on the part of the object undeceived him. It slowly swung around, as

though under the influence of the feeble current, and he could see that it was a log; evidently one of those upon which the savages had descended the river in order to gain and attack the rear of the emigrants.

With a low laugh at his unnecessary fright Ayres advanced, swimming rapidly, intending to use the log in his further progress. But he speedily saw that this action had been made too quickly for his own safety.

His keen eyes detected a suspicious circumstance connected with the log, and he instantly paused. From the further side of the stick he beheld an object that had escaped his eyes before, or else had recently made its appearance there.

There seemed to be a roundish knob or protuberance upon the side of the log. True, this might possibly have been beneath the water until then, and was only revealed by the rolling of the log, but Ayres felt confident that the log had not rolled. He could tell that from the quiet water.

Then it must be— So far he had reasoned, but then, quick as thought, he ducked his head beneath the water.

A sudden movement beside the log had caused this. He beheld the round object raise still higher, and then, with an abrupt movement, a dark tube was whirled around from the top of the log, until its muzzle pointed toward the young adventurer's head.

The knob was the head of a savage—the tube was a rifle, and Ayres knew that he was discovered. All this flashed athwart his mind like a revelation of light, and, as he dove beneath the surface, his plan of procedure was fully determined upon.

He must dispose of this enemy or die. The alarm once given, escape would be almost impossible, and with his capture the hopes of the emigrants would be crushed.

Then he must silence this foe before he could fire his rifle or give the alarm otherwise. But could he do it? That was doubtful; still, as a last hope, he resolved to attempt the feat.

As he sunk beneath the surface Buenos drew his knife and then swam with swift, strong strokes toward the spot where he knew the Indian must be crouching. And his calculations proved correct.

His head struck violently against the half-submerged log, and springing up he dashed the water from his blinded eyes.

The savage was taken by surprise, and evidently had not expected such a bold move. Quite likely he had been in doubt whether the advancing figure was that of an enemy or a friend, as the small bundle fastened upon Ayres's head, added to the gloom, rendered it impossible for a glimpse to be obtained of his features. His action in throwing forward his rifle-muzzle had simply been one of prudence, in case it was really an enemy who approached.

Then when the young man sprang up so suddenly before him, the log being driven against his body with considerable violence, the savage gave vent to a grunt of mingled surprise and bewilderment. But from this he quickly recovered.

Buenos—his first thought being to prevent an alarm—seized upon the rifle-barrel, and with an adroit movement, wrenched it from the grasp of his foe, with the same gesture casting it out into deep water. Then his left hand shot out and clutched the throat of the red-skin with a grip strengthened by the great interests at stake.

But the Indian was a brawny fellow, and as he grappled fiercely with his foeman, he freed his throat sufficiently to emit, loud and clear, the thrilling war-whoop of his tribe. With a curse of bitter vexation, Ayres wrenched his right arm free, and then dealt the savage a swift, vicious blow with the heavy knife.

It penetrated deep, but the wound was not mortal. Once more the shrill yell resounded through the air, awaking echoes far and wide; once again the crimsoned steel rose and fell, with a dull, sickening thud.

With a wild shriek of mortal agony, the death-stricken savage sunk backward, but still his bony fingers clutched the white man with a grip nerved by death. And from the prairie beyond, Ayres could hear the shrill cries of the alarmed red-skins, and then the rapid thud of horses' hoofs approaching the spot at a full gallop.

Then he plunged over the log, head-foremost, and sunk in the water. This action freed him from the dead Indian, and then arising to the surface, Buenos swam for dear life, downstream.

But he knew that did he continue on in this course, he must be discovered by the rapidly-approaching red-skins, and so he turned toward the bank, half resolved to enter the timber and seek safety in flight by land. In this, however, he was disappointed.

Scarcely had he touched shore, when his quick eye detected several dusky figures upon the bank, near the spot where he had slain the Indian. He knew they were the dead man's comrades; one glance told him that.

And the same glance also showed him the form of the dead Indian, his face, horribly distorted with the last agony, upturned toward the star-studded vault of heaven, slowly floating down with the stream, nearing its slayer with each passing moment. Then there uprose a wild cry from those upon the shore, telling that they also had discovered the slain man.

It now seemed as though the fate of the young man was indubitably sealed. Escape from being discovered seemed impossible, and to be captured now, with that terribly significant witness of his deeds lying there before the eyes of all, meant death.

Several heavy splashes were heard, and Ayres saw that while some ran along the bank toward him, others had entered the water, to drag forth their dead comrade. And now the corpse was within a few yards of where he crouched, while almost directly over his head he could hear the heavy tramp of other foes.

Ayres shrunk back against the bank, where the water was several feet deep. He clutched his knife with desperation, resolved to sell his life dearly should he be discovered. But then his heart thrilled with a gleam of joy.

In the bank beside him was a small hole or depression, that had evidently been washed out by the action of the water. Instantly one hand was extended to ascertain its size.

It only reached a few inches above the surface, and was over a foot in depth, running back into the bank. Below, it was still larger, and Ayres believed that by its aid he could still escape his foes.

All this occurred in a breath of time, and the water was still agitated by the heavy plunges, when Buenos glided back and into the fortunately-discovered refuge. By crouching almost double, he managed to stow his body away in the hole, with his legs doubled beneath his body.

A quick gesture daubed his face with the soft black mud, and then Buenos awaited the result in painful surprise. For not only did his own life depend upon it, but, in all probability, those of his friends in the besieged corral, as well.

His head was drawn back into the hole, so that his nose was barely above water, and his face beyond the surface of the bank. The mud had rendered his features the color of the dirt surrounding, and only by touching him, could the savages have discovered the difference.

Through his half closed lids, Buenos watched the movements of the savages, now almost directly opposite him. A shower of dirt rolled down from above, telling that those he had noticed on shore were still near at hand.

Then a new and startling sound came to the ears of the young adventurer. He heard the shrill yells—the wild outcry—the rattling of rifles, all telling of another deadly assault upon the wagon train.

The savages in the water paused as if startled, and then hastily grasping the body of their dead comrade, they swam rapidly ashore with it, landing just below where crouched the young man. Words passed between them and the others, the purport of which Ayres could only guess, owing to his complete ignorance of the dialect.

Then the corpse was handed up the bank, and shortly afterward Buenos heard the quick trampling of feet, as a number of Indians dashed away toward the train. He believed they were all gone, and made a movement as though he would have left his covert, in order to continue his journey, without any more loss of time.

But fortunately for him, Ayres recognized the folly of such precipitation, before it was too late. From almost directly above him, he heard the low sound of voices, and knew by it that his enemies had not yet given up the search for the slayer of their friend.

With wildly beating heart Buenos listened to the progress of the struggle above; but it speedily died away, and then all was still. The absence of the red-skins' yells of triumph, told Ayres that his friends had successfully repulsed the onset, and his heart lightened considerably.

Had he only been at liberty to resume his journey, all might yet be well. But though he

could no longer hear the sound of voices, Ayres felt assured that the red-skins were still upon the watch.

They must know that an enemy had stricken them a bitter blow near that spot, and would reason that he could not have gotten far away, before their arrival. That he was still hidden somewhere in close proximity to the spot of death.

As time passed by, Buenos began to grow still more uneasy. Every moment was valuable now, and he should even then be miles away upon his important mission.

But what if these savages should keep up the watch until day dawned? Then they would assuredly unearth him.

Not only would he be doomed, in such a case, but the last hope of the besieged emigrants would be dashed to the ground. Unassisted, they must soon succumb to the overpowering force of the red-skins.

A desperate resolve began to shape itself in the mind of our young adventurer. He would dare all, and emerge from his covert. It could be but death, at the most, and that risk he would rather run, than longer endure this horrible, agonizing suspense.

Still he could hear no sound of his enemies, and as the moments passed on, Ayres made the desperate move. Were the Indians still lying in wait for some such movement on the part of their unknown enemy, he knew that he was lost.

They could scarcely fail to hear him, or discover his motions. The line of shadow was fearfully narrowed, and at but a short distance ahead, where the belt of timber came to an end, the bright moonlight revealed every inch of the water's surface.

Just as he had straightened out his limbs, preparatory to emerging from his uncomfortable hiding-place, Ayres paused. Another alarm rung out upon the air, from beyond the wagon-train.

Then came a single shrill war-whoop, that he had so often listened to on that eventful night, followed by wild shouts from the Indians, telling of some important discovery. And then, from almost directly above his head, there sounded a guttural exclamation, closely followed by the tramp of human feet.

Ayres shuddered convulsively as he realized the extent of the peril he had so nearly brought upon himself, by his rash action. He knew now that the red-skins had indeed been lying in wait for him, and only for this strange diversion, would inevitably have made the desired discovery.

Though sadly puzzled to account for the outcry—for Ayres well knew that the latter cries were those of exultation—the young man dared not dally longer, but slipping forth from his hiding-place, he swam rapidly down-stream for a few yards, until near the end of the timber-belt furthest from the corral.

Then he cautiously scaled the bank, and entered the dense undergrowth. Pausing, he hearkened intently.

All was still in his immediate vicinity, although from near the wagon-train he could hear an occasional rifle-shot, telling that his friends were still upon the alert. And then he glided stealthily forward until at the edge of the prairie.

Cautiously peering forth upon the vast, level expanse thus spread before him, Buenos saw with delight that as far as his eye could reach, there was not a single living form to be seen. The road appeared open before him, and he was about to enter upon it when a sudden recollection caused him to pause.

The revolver was still strapped upon his head, according to the advice given him by Tom Maxwell, but it was far from being in a condition fit for use. The sudden dive, on seeing the savage beside the log, added to several immersions since, had pretty thoroughly saturated it.

Not knowing at what moment he might be called upon to make use of it, in order to preserve his life, Ayres's first move was to draw the bullets, and wiping the chambers dry, he carefully reloaded them. Then fitting on the water-proof caps, he replaced it in his belt, and once more stepped forth upon the prairie.

Had he not already lost so much time, Buenos would probably have exercised more precaution than he was now using. But, racked with anxiety and the dread of being too late to aid his comrades in peril, rendered him half wild.

Crouching low down, he ran at a rapid pace out over the level prairie, in the direction he must follow in order to strike the Main Trail,

which they had so unfortunately—as it proved—deviated from a couple of days previous. The moon still shone brightly, and there was great danger of his being discovered by some of the lynx-eyed savages, who surrounded the wagon-train.

But this Ayres resolved to risk, rather than lose any more time, although he knew that, in case he should be seen, there could be but one ending to the affair.

Fortunately for him, perhaps the suspicions of the red-skins had been lulled by the recent capture of Tom Maxwell, for they believed him to be the one who had slain their brother below the corral, as well as the one beside whose body he had been captured. Thus they did not dream of another foeman being at liberty so near them.

As Ayres glanced back over his shoulder, a shudder crept over his frame, for he now realized the full extent of the great peril he was daring. Behind him he could quite plainly distinguish the dark corral, and still nearer the numerous figures, dusky and phantom-like, moving restlessly hither and yon, that he knew were none other than savages.

It seemed as though they could not fail of seeing him, and as he once more sped on at an accelerated speed, Buenos listened with painful intentness, expecting each moment to hear the shrill war-cry peal forth, telling that the blood-thirsty demons were upon his trail.

But then he crossed the slight rise, and the fear-inspiring sight was hidden from his view. Then breathing more freely, he took the polestar for his guide, and dashed on a break-neck speed, every nerve strained to its utmost tension, and his heart wildly throbbing with renewed hope of success.

For well-nigh an hour he maintained this killing pace, but then Nature forced him to slacken his gait and proceed with more prudence. His eyes were roving upon every side of him, trying to recall some landmark, though he well knew he was yet far from the Main Trail—the object of his quest.

He crossed a slight swell and trotted down the opposite slope, into a sort of valley, if it may be called such. Then he began ascending the next rise.

Suddenly he paused. A suspicious sound saluted his hearing; the *thud—thud*—of a horse's hoofs beating upon the hard turf in a full gallop.

And this, too, he soon found was approaching him, for the trampling grew louder and more distinct. But it was not coming from the direction of the corral, though this was Ayres's first thought. Instead, it was coming from directly in his front.

Buenos glanced hurriedly around for some cover within which to ensconce himself, but no such sight rewarded his search. There was not a bush or bunch of grass to be seen within reach.

And at that moment the figure of a horse and rider loomed up clear and distinct upon the ridge, almost directly before the young man. As by an impulse, Buenos dropped flat to the ground and drew his revolver, ready for use in case he was discovered.

Then the horseman came thundering on, seemingly about to ride directly over the prostrate form. A collision appeared inevitable, and Buenos, with tightly compressed lips, cocked his pistol.

On thundered the horse, and was within a score of yards of the young man, when, with a wild snort, it turned to one side, then dashed on with accelerated speed, in its passage flinging a tiny shower of dust and sand over Ayres. A hoarse cry broke from the lips of its rider as he swayed in his seat, but he did not appear to notice the cause of his animal's affright, for he did not once glance around or backward, but rose the swell and disappeared beyond its crest with the same mad, reckless gallop.

Ayres rose with a cry of astonishment as the man vanished from sight. A puzzled look rested upon his face.

In the brief glance he had obtained of the rider's features, he knew that it was a white man, but wonder had checked the cry of greeting he would otherwise have uttered. Buenos did not know that the mad rider was none other than Dusky Dick, the traitor guide and black-hearted renegade; but such was indeed the case.

Had he known it, Ayres would have sent a revolver bullet hissing after the villain on the instant, instead of now gazing at the little cloud of dust that was all there was left to indicate the swift passage. But then Buenos once more resumed his way with quickened steps.

CHAPTER VIII.

SAVAGE TACTICS.

"Look, Tom!" abruptly muttered Travers, gently touching the shoulder of his ruminating companion. "The red rascals are moving!"

The Delaware turned his keen eyes toward the valley and gazed for a moment in silence. Then he answered, in a slightly vexed tone:

"Yeh, dey go hide now. Skeered plenty bad, dey is. Don't know what to mek 'cause Kischkouch git killed. Tink spirits here, mebbe. Go hide—den watch plenty sharp. Dat's it."

"But that will not do, Tom," added Travers, vexedly. "They will keep us here all night, then. If we venture to move they'll pick us off, one after the other. I wish we had fired at them as they stood out there—but it's too late now."

"Yeh—see—dey hide now. Ought to shoot den—now can't. Shoot—kill one, two, den orders run 'way off, like de debble. Cap'n he say no—see now dat Delaware was right," tersely replied the savage.

"But what shall we do? That fellow has gone for help, no doubt, and when he comes back they'll soon make this place too hot for us. As it is, those devils can hold us here as long as they feel like it. We can't move without bringing out a rifle-bullet. Come, find some way, Tom," impatiently added Travers, who evidently relied far more upon the cunning and resources of his companion in times of difficulty like this than upon his own powers.

"Me do it. Skeer Arapahoe bad dis time. Git scalp, too, ef don't look out. No fun, dough, skeer dem—git skeered too easy—den run plenty fast. Got long legs, dem Arapahoes," chuckled Tom, as he drew his knife from the belt at his waist.

"What do you intend doing, Tom?"

"Keep eyes open wide, den mebbe so you see," grunted the savage, who evidently felt his importance in no small degree.

With his knife he cut several scrubby bushes, and then bound them around his head and shoulders, but in such a manner that they would not interfere materially with his sight. This accomplished to his satisfaction, he turned toward Travers, who was now dividing his attention between his companion and the valley below, where the red-skins were hidden.

"Now you open ear—me tell. Injuns down dere—you here—me go some oder place. Den me shoot Arapahoe—de orders dey jump up, all same like rabbit—don't know where me be—den you shoot—kill 'noder. Den me holler loud—you holler—dey holler an' run like de debble, 'way off. See?" hurriedly explained Tom.

"You mean to crawl around them?"

"Yeh—dat's it."

"Then shoot one—"

"You shoot 'noder—den dey run 'way off."

"I believe they would," thoughtfully said Travers. "But it will be dangerous for you. Can you get down without their seeing you? If they do, you're a dead man sure!"

"No—they shoot, but can't hit Delaware. Can't hit—don't know how shoot, dem Arapahoe. Hit hill, mebbe, not'ing else," laughed Tom, a low, gleesome laugh, full of joy at the prospect of outwitting his hereditary foes.

"I know you think an Arapahoe is fit for nothing but crow-bait, Tom, but you may get fooled. Some of them are brave and cunning warriors—"

"No—no, Arapahoe squaw—all squaw!" angrily bitted the Delaware.

"Well, have it your own way. But be careful. Don't be foolhardy, man, and throw away your life uselessly. Better go now; it's growing late and there's no time to lose."

The Delaware turned away without a word, and passing his companion, he disappeared among the bushes beyond. Though he affected to laugh at the danger of his venture, nevertheless it was a perilous one, and one, too, that would require not a little caution and skill to carry out successfully.

As stated, the line of bushes fringed the base of the cliff, and then ran out, leaving the hillside bare and devoid of cover, except a few small boulders and patches of stunted grass. For nearly fifty yards this stretch lay beneath the full vision of the warriors hidden below.

But Red Skin Tom felt assured that he could accomplish the feat, and truly, he, if any one, could do so.

Aided by the leafy screen upon his head, and the boulders scattered around, he hoped to pass over this open space unobserved, and this once done, he would have the best of cover for his further operations. As for the rest of the programme, he considered that the same as settled.

He knew that most, if not all the six Indians were Arapahoes, and as seen, he looked upon them with supreme contempt. He believed that at his shot, they would act much as he had said, and the way be easily cleared for his friend's departure for the camp.

When he gained the end of the bushes, Tom paused and peered keenly out upon the valley below. But even his sharp eyes could not detect the presence of a foe, save in the riderless horses that were feeding on the bank of the creek.

Still, he knew pretty well where the savages were hidden, and acted accordingly. Now he was forced to "crawl," or in other words, to crawl backward, as his head and shoulders were the only parts of his person concealed by the bush.

By so doing he calculated upon reaching a little gully that ran down to the creek, unobserved, as the bush would seem to stand still, from where the Indians were hidden, for to gain this ditch, Tom would be forced to back directly from their position. All this had been foreseen by the Delaware and calculated upon when he spoke so confidently of success in his bold ruse.

Slowly and carefully he proceeded—or receded—crouching low down, keeping the leafy head-dress as steady as possible under the circumstances. His eyes were riveted upon the spot where he believed the Arapahoes to be hidden, his muscles in readiness to avoid a shot, should such be threatened, by a sudden spring.

But that shot did not come, and it was plain that the savages either did not notice, or else believed the bush to be a natural one. It would have required a long and careful scrutiny from the point where they were lying hid, to tell that the bush moved, for Tom was retreating in an almost direct line from them. Besides, the moonlight was deceitful and favored the working of the ruse.

Then Tom gained the edge of the gully, and gently backed over it, alighting upon his feet in the soft dirt and debris that covered the bottom. He listened intently for a moment, but all was still.

A glow of grim delight swept athwart his features at this, for he knew that the enemy were still ignorant of the plan on foot to circumvent them. The Delaware, now that the most difficult portion of his task was accomplished, felt no doubt but the rest would end as happily.

With the friendly twigs still upon his head, he turned and glided down the gully, after unslinging the rifle from his back, and carefully inspecting the cap. From seeing the enemy disappear, Tom had formed a pretty accurate idea of where they were hid.

He knew that they had not recrossed the creek, and consequently they only had an oblong circle of some two score yards' diameter, in which to conceal themselves. Inside this, then, Tom knew he must find his game.

Gliding along, crouching so that his head was below the level of the bank, Red-skin soon gained the bank of the creek, and pausing, he peered cautiously toward the suspected spot. A low grunt of disgust broke from his lips, as he saw that a little ridge hid the Indians from his view, while standing in the gully.

Then his eyes roved around, restlessly. A brief moment sufficed to form his plans.

Removing the revolver from his girdle, he entered the stream, and then holding the weapon above the water, he glided slowly along toward the enemy, hidden, as before, by the bank. As many minutes sufficed to carry him over the few yards necessary to traverse, and then, confident that he had gained a point whence he could spot the red-skins, Tom prepared for action.

The revolver he cautiously shoved upon the edge of the bank, beside a small boulder, and then followed it with the muzzle of his rifle. But then, with a sudden recollection, he paused.

Along the bank, for a number of yards, there was not a bush or shrub of any kind to be seen. Although he affected to despise the Arapahoes as warriors, the Delaware knew right well that the sudden appearance of a bush where none had grown before, could scarcely escape their keen eyes; and, under the peculiar circumstances, its appearance would most probably be greeted with a rifle-ball.

So he noiselessly untied the thongs that secured the leafy head-dress in place, suffering it to drop into the water, and float away with the gentle current. Then he slowly raised his eyes to a level with the bank.

For a full minute nothing suspicious rewarded his gaze; but Tom was by far too cunning a scout and warrior to risk the success of his

plans by a precipitate movement. Then his eyes slowly roved over each inch of the ground, again and again.

The wisdom of this caution was soon apparent. Beside a goodly-sized boulder, the Delaware now discovered a portion of a red-skin's body, though it first appeared part and parcel of the stone.

This was enough. Tom knew that sufficient was revealed to bury a bullet in, so that it would touch the seat of life, and that by waiting for a better target, he might spoil all.

Slowly and deliberately, as if aiming at a target of wood, the rifle drew upon the unsuspecting savage, and the black eye of the Delaware flashed along the dark tube with a deadly glare. And then his finger tightened upon the trigger.

The whip-like crack rung out with startling clearness; but it was blended with a horrible yell of agony, as the stricken savage writhed upon the ground in his death-throes. Red-skin Tom seldom found it necessary to fire twice at the same object.

As the sounds broke the air, the horses, that had been quietly cropping the rich grass, snorted with affright, and after turning their heads wildly, sprung off a few yards; then stood with trembling limbs, oying the strange scene.

As Tom had anticipated, the unexpected shot had so startled the red skins that they sprung up from their coverts and glared wildly round in search of their hidden foe. Cries of wondering fear broke from their lips.

Then a spout of flame shot forth from the line of bushes upon the hillside, and a second messenger of death sped upon its way; another of the savages reeled wildly, and then fell to the ground, the hot life-blood gurgling from his chest.

Red-skin Tom snatched his revolver and discharged it, uttering a wild yell—the war-whoop that had more than once carried terror and confusion into the hearts of his foemen. Though this shot did not seem to have taken effect, the bold fellow sprung forth from the water, and pealing forth his yell, sprung toward the surviving Arapahoes, firing as he came.

Simultaneously there echoed back a hoarse cheer from the hillside, and Travers sprung into view, his revolver echoing back the quick reports from that in the hands of the Delaware.

As yet the Arapahoes had not burned a grain of powder, so greatly were they confused by this sudden and deadly onset. The two men dashing toward them, with rapidly detonating pistols, were magnified ten-fold, and as with one accord, the survivors turned and fled from the spot of death, with wild screeches of dismay and terror.

"Hurrah, Tom! spot them—they're ours!" shouted Travers, wild with excitement, as his revolver sent a bullet crashing into the brain of a third red-skin. "Don't let one get away!"

Loud and clear came the answering yell of the Delaware, as he sprung forward in hot pursuit of the fleeing foe. He only thought that his enemies were before him, and his heart was filled with ferocious hatred.

The foremost Arapahoe reached the horses, and it seemed as though the secondary object of the two scouts would be defeated after all; but the frantic haste of the savage favored them, unexpectedly. In his terror he made a quick grasp at the trailing halter; but his foot slipping upon the damp grass, he fell to the ground, even as his fingers tightened upon the plaited rope.

The sudden jerk added to the mustang's affright, and caused him to rear violently back, half-raising the Indian to his feet; but then the hand slipped from the smooth rope, and thus freed, the terrified horse turned with a shrill scream, and dashed madly up the valley, followed by its companions.

A faint cry broke from the lips of the Arapahoes at this new misfortune; but they dared not pause. Close behind them they could hear the heavy tramp of their enemies, and then came two more shots.

Without pausing a moment, the savages dashed on, while the one whose haste had wrought them such harm, scrambled to his feet. But no sooner was he up, than he was down again.

Red-skin Tom, with a shrill scream of frantic fury, pounced upon his back, hurling the red-skin violently forward, his face plowing up the decayed grass and soft dirt. Half-senseless from the shock, he offered but feeble resistance to his powerful enemy.

Red-skin Tom dug his knees violently into the back of the Arapahoe, while one hand clutched his neck with the force of a vise. Then the

empty revolver was upraised, for a moment remaining motionless to gather momentum; then the heavy, brass-bound butt fell with a sickening thud full upon the bared head of the ill-fated savage.

Another yell broke from Tom's lips, as he dashed the clotted blood and brains from his eyes, and sprung to his feet, glaring ferociously around in search of another victim. But the carnage was over.

The two surviving Arapahoes had vanished among the shadows, and Travers was returning from the pursuit. But Tom darted forward, his eyes glowing with a diabolical fire.

"Stop, Tom!" cried the soldier, as he grasped his comrade, "where are you going? They've got clear by now. You couldn't find them in the dark, anyhow."

"Let go—me kill Arapahoe debbill!" snarled the Delaware, struggling fiercely in the powerful grasp of the captain.

"No, they're gone. Don't be a fool, man. There's four scalps if you want them. That's enough for once. Do you hear?"

The savage suddenly ceased his struggles, though with ill-grace. But then his face brightened as he glanced back upon the ghastly forms of the fallen red-skins.

"Come, help me catch their horses first, Tom," said Travers. "If we don't mind they'll give us the slip altogether."

Without a word the Delaware followed his companion up the valley, where they could hear the frightened horses, still snorting wildly. The soldier began to fear they would experience not a little trouble in effecting their capture.

But both he and the Delaware were old hands among the horses, and Tom set out to gain the further side of the animals, in order to prevent their flight. This was quickly accomplished, and then, while Travers stood still, the Delaware slowly advanced toward the trembling group.

They permitted his approach without a motion, save to huddle close together, until nearly within arm's length, but then they dashed off toward the soldier. Travers stood still with outstretched hand, and, after a few minutes' delay, one of them came close enough for him to secure the halter.

Then it was an easy task to collect the others, which once accomplished, the two men returned down the valley where had taken place the deadly surprise. The four dead forms presented a ghastly sight, and even Travers could not repress a shudder, as he recalled the frightful scene.

"Take their scalps, if you will, Tom," he said, as the Delaware drew his knife. "But be quick about it. And then tumble their bodies into the creek, before we call the lady. The sight would be horrible enough to kill her."

"Squaw no so soft like dat," laughed the Delaware, as he shook the first trophy to free it from the gouts of blood, before securing it to his girdle. "Stan' big heap, they kin. No kill 'um so easy, like dat."

"Hurry up—don't be so long, Tom. There's a long trail before us, and not much time to lose. It's nearly daylight now."

But the Delaware seemed to find a peculiar pleasure in his revolting task, and took his own time about it. This was the reward of his tedious exercise of Indian tactics.

But then the job was completed by dragging the mutilated dead to the stream, and casting them in, when the current quickly swept them away. As the last corpse disappeared, Travers raised his voice and bade Clara come down; that all danger was past.

But there came no reply. Again he called, louder than before. Still the silence, save in the echoes of his own voice among the hills.

Travers wondered at this, though he did not think of any serious wrong. He believed that Clara, frightened by the wild struggle, had not yet recovered sufficiently to recognize his voice.

"Here Tom, hold the horses, and I will go up after her," said Travers, a little impatiently. "She's afraid to come down alone."

Muttering at the foolish squeamishness of the white squaw, the Delaware did as bade, and then the soldier lightly bounded up the steep hillside. As he neared the bushes, Travers called again:

"Miss Calhoun—Clara, come out. It is all over, and the road is free for us. Come."

Still no answer, save in the echoes of his own voice as before. A strange fear seized upon the strong-hearted soldier.

Why this continued silence? Why did not the maiden answer him? Could it be, that, frightened at the scene of death and bloodshed, she had fainted?

Believing this the true solution of the dead silence, he sprung forward and parted the bushes. A wild cry broke from his lips.

The covert was empty—unoccupied, save by the still and lifeless form of the Arapahoe, who had fallen by the strong hand of Red-skin Tom. Where was Clara?

"What fo' you mek holler like dat? Where squaw?" called out the Delaware from below.

"My God! Tom, she's gone! She is not here!" gasped Travers, in wondering alarm.

CHAPTER IX.

BOUND TO THE STAKE.

THE situation of old Tom Maxwell, was not one to be envied. Lying helplessly bound, surrounded by a score of yelling, exultant red-skins, who showered kicks and cuffs upon him with merciless celerity.

Taken in the very act of slaying one of their comrades, he could expect but little mercy at their hands; indeed he felt some surprise that they spared his life even for those few moments.

Suddenly a tall, powerful form strode through the corral, rudely elbowing the braves aside, all resistance ceasing as they caught sight of the one who handled them so unceremoniously. Evidently the new-comer was one high in rank among them, judging from the deference with which he was regarded.

Waving back the red-skins, he stood over the form of the captive scout, gazing keenly at his upturned features. A quick and powerful change passed over his face, and a hoarse cry broke from his lips, while one hand nervously clutched the tomahawk that hung at his side.

"Ugh! Three Scalps!" he uttered in his native tongue; and even then there seemed to be a tinge of respectful admiration in his voice.

"Yes, so they call me in your lingo, 'Rapahoe,'" coolly returned Maxwell, as he gazed fixedly at the face of the savage. "I s'pose you know how I ain't the name, don't ye?"

"Yeh, me know. Big warrior, you. Kill heap Arapahoe. Won't kill no more, dough. Git kill self, bum-by. How like dat, eh?" added the Indian, with a leer of ferocious joy upon his features, as he crouched over the captive pale-face.

"Don't know, chief, ontel a'ter I've tried it a time or two. Reckon I'd like it fast rate, soon's I git kinder used to it a bit. But you're jokin', ain't ye, now?"

"Jokin'—wha' dat?"

"Foolin'—makin' b'lieve—sorter throwin' dust in a feller's eyes, like, ye know, so to speak. What fer do you want to kill me? I hain't done nothin' much, onless it is killin' a few dozen 'Rapahoes, fer which you'd order thank me, 'stead o' holdin' any grudge," and the reckless old scout chuckled grimly.

"You kill Arapahoe—Arapahoes kill you. Kill Cagoula here, kill oder brave ober dere. You die fo' dat."

"What other? You ain't goin' to blame a feller fer what ain't his fault, be ye? Ef I tuck a notion to shoot out here at a bunch o' grass, an' one o' your durned copper-skins runs ag'inst the bullet, be I to blame? But I didn't do it—you cain't prove 'at I killed any other skunk 'cept this 'ere one."

"Kin too, me tell. Kill 'noder brave down dere—in water—stick one wid knife. Den run 'way like de debble," angrily added the chief.

"When—where was that?" asked Maxwell, a sudden hope springing up in his breast at the last words of the Indian.

"S'pose you tek good hoss—ride like debble—mek hair all wet on hoss. Dat lng, mebbe," tersely replied the Arapahoe.

Maxwell's form quivered with a new-born hope. He knew that the time metaphorically stated by the chief, would be about that which had transpired since the alarm had arisen, so closely following the desperate venture of Buenos Ayres. Could it be that he had been deceived—that the young man had indeed eluded the vigilance of his enemies, and was still at liberty?

For some moments Tom dared not trust himself to speak. He dreaded lest the swarthy Hercules should suspect the truth from his tones.

"You mean the feller who tried to stop me down thar? In the water?" he said, at a venture.

"Yeh."

"You fellers didn't see me, then, as I swum back up the river?"

"No. You do dat way?" eagerly asked the chief. "In course. You hunted fer me, didn't you? Ef I'd 'a' stayed thar you'd 'a' found me, wouldn't ye?"

"Yeh, me see now. Injun he big fool dat time, but got you now. Keep you, too. Tek scalp bum-by. How you like burn at stake, eh? Laugh plenty loud, den, eh? T'ink so?" and the chief chuckled diabolically.

"Me—burn me? Git out; you're crazy, Injun. Cain't do that—won't burn; d'putt the fire all out. I'm all frozen water, I be. Tell you what I'll do. Bet ye my hat 'at I kin stan' fire longer 'bout siz-zlin' 'n you kin. Thar now, what sez ye?"

The savage laughed a little at the sublime impudence of his captive, but then turned away and entered into conversation with several of the more prominent braves.

Maxwell had an object in view in thus chaffing with his captor. He felt assured now that Buenos Ayres had indeed succeeded in passing the cordon in safety, and that he was even then far away in search of help.

Thus, every moment of time gained was invaluable to his comrades. If he could delay an attack until daylight, he believed that the train would be

saved, as the Indians would scarcely brave an assault in broad daytime, knowing the great loss they must suffer in such a case.

Hoping to learn something definite regarding the red-skins' plans, Tom keenly strained his ears to catch the words of those who were collected around the chief, at but a few yards from where stood the captive scout. His partial knowledge of the dialect stood him in good stead here.

He heard his own name—or the *so'riquet* given him for a deed of peculiar daring some years before, Three Scalps—coupled together with the emigrant train; and then another name met his ear; that of Dusky Dick.

His suspicions, then, were only too true. This desperate attack was indeed the work of the Traitor Guide. These savages were under his orders; then where was he?

But soon other interests riveted his attention upon the savages once more. They were debating upon him—settling the mode and time of his death.

Despite his hardihood and great bravery, the old guide shuddered as he caught the words of the chief. To die, and by such a death, was horrible!

"His hands are red with the blood of the Arapahoe; he must die! But he is a great brave; his name is Three Scalps. Do you know how he gained that name? Listen. Four Arapahoe braves attacked him upon the prairie and shot his horse; he was alone. They were good braves and skillful warriors, but they were no match for him. He killed and took the scalps of three; the other fled, with a bullet through his breast. He gained the lodges of his people and told his story; then he died. We called the white warrior Three Scalps."

"He is a great brave, but he must die. He has fallen into our power at last; but the death of a man awaits him. He shall die by fire; the wolves must not pick his bones. Wapashaw has spoken."

"The chief is wise," slowly uttered one of the elder braves; "but does he not forget? What will the white chief say? He bade us capture this man and keep him so that he might slay him with his own hand."

"Wapashaw is a chief. Who shall say he does wrong? Not a pale-face, with blood like water. Is the White Snake greater than a chief of the Arapahoes? No! He does not dare speak hot words to Wapashaw. He knows that my arm is strong and my tomahawk sharp. Three Scalps must die; I have said it!" sternly added the chief, as he turned away.

Where was Dusky Dick? Why did he not put in an appearance, now that one of his bitterest enemies was helplessly a captive?

This fact puzzled Tom not a little. But then he thought of the imminent peril that threatened himself.

"Durned consol'n', that is—I guess not!" muttered Tom, disgustedly. "S'pose I'd orter feel proud, but I don't—not a mite. B'lieve I'd rather they'd think I was a pesky coward, ef so be they'd think I wasn't worth sizzlin'." Ugh! it makes the sweat come jest to think on it! What'll it be then, though? Oh, Lord!

He watched the movements of the savages with anxious eyes. Although as brave as most men, there was something fearful in contemplating this mode of being sent out of the world.

"Wonder ef it'll hurt me? Bet it will—know it, 'most. Ef 'twouldn't, I wouldn't keer so much. Wish to ge-mineezers 'at I'd staid in the corral!" grumbled Tom, as he tugged desperately upon his bonds.

But this effort was in vain. The hide-thongs had been applied by too careful a hand, for him to slip them from his wrists, and the tough cords only sunk deeper into the yielding flesh, with each succeeding effort.

It was quite evident that whatever scruples a few of the elder braves might have entertained as to the advisability of such a decided course, were quickly overruled by the stern-willed chief, Wapashaw, and then the necessary preparations for the feast were speedily under way. A score of savages dashed away toward the timber-belt, with drawn hatchets, and then came the quick, heavy strokes, telling that wood was being collected.

Maxwell noted their movements with naturally troubled feelings. He saw his fate was sealed beyond a doubt, unless he could effect an escape.

But this seemed impossible. Alone, he was helpless as an infant. There was nothing for it but to watch and wait.

In a short time the savages returned from the timber-belt, bearing huge back-loads of dried wood, which, at a word from Wapashaw, they carried over to the hill, near whose top it was heaped. There was a double meaning in this selection of the spot for the sacrifice.

Of a necessity, there must be a number of braves left around the corral to guard against another messenger venturing forth, and these would wish to witness the sport. Did it take place upon the hillside, they could do so as well as those within the corral.

The hill, too, was beyond reach of rifle-shot, and so the bright light could not serve to guide an avenging bullet. For these reasons had the hill been selected by the astute chief of the Arapahoes.

Then the form of the old guide was lifted from the ground by several brawny warriors, and borne toward the rudely-improvised stake. Tom's heart sunk anew, for he hoped to be able to break away from his captors, during the walk to the hill. But Wapashaw knew too well the nature of the man he had to deal with, to run any unnecessary risks.

Maxwell uttered a bitter curse of rage as he realized this. But a savage leer upon the countenance of Wapashaw revealed the delight his chagrin gave

the rascal, and Tom smothered his emotion, until he gave no outward sign of feeling his position, though his teeth were firmly clinched and his breath came hard and strong.

In a few minutes the hill was gained, and the old scout was placed with his back against the firmly-planted stake. Not until a strong lariat was twined around both his body and the post, were his feet freed from their bonds, his hands still remaining tied.

"Ugh!" grunted Wapashaw, as he stood ordering the proceeding, addressing Maxwell. "Three Scalps no feared now! Holler plenty loud, by-'n-by, when fire burns. T'ink so?"

"Not much, chief. You'll only git fooled ef you expect me to holler. Fire cain't burn me—it cain't. I'm proof ag'in' lead an' steel, too. Didn't know that afore, did ye? Why you mought stan' thar an' shoot your rifle plum ag'in' my face, an' the bullet 'd jest bounce back ag'in, like it hed hit a rock. Your hatchet 'd break jest like a piece o' ice, ef you was to hit me, hard. It would so?" earnestly responded Tom. "S'pose you try it an' see, now, jest fer fun."

Wapashaw gazed steadily at the old guide for a moment, but then a grim smile swept athwart his countenance. He divined the motive that actuated his captive, but was far from willing to gratify him.

"S'pose you t'ink Arapahoe chief be big fool, talk like dat? S'pose shoo—hit 'um wid tom'hawk, den 'um, o d a , qu ck. Den no git burn. Three Scalps brave, plenty cunning, but so Wapashaw. No git fooled 'is time," and the chief chuckled sardonically.

"Ah, git out! Think ye're some, don't ye? Durned smart, you be—whar the hide's rubbed off. Fool nothin'—cain't sp'ile a rotten aigg, you durned gumphead, you," retorted Tom, with an angry glare in his eyes.

He had indeed strove to induce the chief to end all at one blow, by his boasting, for he had racked his brain in vain to devise some other mode of escaping the horrible death. Feeling assured that his time to die was at hand, he wished it over at once.

Though Maxwell spoke boldly enough, there was a dull, heavy sinking at his heart, as he noted the preparations for his torture. He knew that mortal man could never endure that fearful trial, without giving utterance to his agony.

He knew that death would come, but it would be lingering; before oblivion he must suffer ten thousand deaths. That is what he desired to escape.

The dried fagots were piled around at a few yards' distance from the stake, so that death should not too quickly claim its victim. Time must be given them to do ample honor to the great bravery and prowess that Three Scalps had so frequently displayed, greatly to their harm.

Tom could look down upon the corral, though it was but faintly outlined in the dim light, for the moon had sunk low down, and daybreak was close at hand. He knew that his comrades must be cognizant of his capture, whether they also knew of his threatened doom or no.

But he could expect no assistance from them. They would have enough to do in guarding themselves, and the dear, helpless ones depending upon their strong arms for safety.

Then Wapashaw took a torch that had been hastily kindled by one of the warriors, and holding it to the dry kindlings, the pile of fagots was soon in a blaze, shooting up from a dozen different points. And around the funeral pyre danced the yelling and screeching red-skins, apparently half frantic with demoniac joy.

CHAPTER X.

THE WINDING TRAIL.

At this wild cry from Captain Travers, Red-skin Tom abandoned the horses they had secured after so much trouble and danger, and darted up the hillside toward the spot where such a startling discovery had been made by the soldier. It did not seem possible, and the Indian evidently believed that Travers had made some mistake in the spot.

But then he also saw that Clara was gone from the place where she had been left but a few short minutes before. Gone—where? Why had she fled? Or had some enemy spirited her away?

These were the questions that poured from the lips of the soldier, as his comrade gained his side. For a time Tom made no reply, and bent low down over the ground, as if trying to read the truth by some sign left there.

"She gone—dat all we know now," grunted the Indian, as he rose erect. "Don't know how—mebbe tell bumbye, when light comes 'g'in."

"Do you think that any one has carried her off, Tom?" asked Travers, agitatedly.

"Mebbe so—mebbe not so. Don't know not'ing, me say. Too much dark—can't see. She gone, dat all me kin tell now," persisted the Indian doggedly.

Travers glanced anxiously up at the heavens. The moon had rolled on, until the cliff above their heads shut off the light from the hillside.

All there was dim and indistinct; light enough to distinguish forms, but not sufficiently so to trace out a trail, especially when left upon the rocky ground by so light a foot as that of the missing maiden. As Tom had said, the truth could not be learned until the day had dawned.

Fortunately, this period was not far distant. A couple of hours, at most, and the sun would make its appearance.

But in that length of time, what might not happen? If the maiden was in the hands of an enemy, she would be conveyed far beyond their reach before they could strike the trail.

And then there was danger to themselves, too, as

well. The messenger who had been dispatched for help, hours before by the Arapahoes, might return at any moment, bringing a force that they could not hope to cope with successfully. Or the two savages who had fled the massacre of their comrades might chance upon friends, and gathering courage from that fact, return to avenge the slaughter of their brethren.

All these thoughts agitated the minds of the two men as they stood gazing gloomily upon each other. That they were puzzled was plain; equally plain was it that not for even a moment did either think of abandoning to her fate the maiden who had so strangely been thrown upon their protection, and for whom they had already done so much.

"What must we do now, Tom?" muttered Travers, speaking mechanically, not that he hoped to gain anything by the reply.

"Do not'ing now—bumby do somefin. When light come ag'in, we take trail—foller up till flin' squaw."

"But do you think we can?"

"Know so—almost. Got eye plenty sharp, Tom. Foller trail in water, ef try hard. Me foller trail—cap'n ride hoss. Den we git her; go back camp; laugh like de debble, 'cause skeered when squaw git lost."

"But she may have been carried off?" suggested the soldier, taking the gloomy side of the question as the true one.

"No; don't t'ink dat. Injun grab her, squaw holler so loud—squeal all same like pant'er. Den we hear, sure. No holler loud; den Injun no take. She git skeered mebbe, 'cause 'um kill Arapahoe. Don't know much when skeered. No see straight—t'ink mebbe a frien' git kill, not bad Injun. Den 'frail dey git her too, so run 'way off plenty fast. Me t'ink dat," succinctly stated Tom, with the argumentative air of a lawyer summing up his case.

"Do you think so?" eagerly cried Travers. "Then she may be hidden somewhere near here. Surely she could not run far, she was so weak from her fall. If you call, she may hear and answer."

"You holler, if you like. Me go git horses 'g'in. Don't like much walk when kin ride. Plenty better aa'," grinned the Delaware, who began descending the hillside toward the captured animals, who had stood still on being left.

Travers acted upon this supposition, making the hills echo with the sound of his voice calling aloud the maiden's name as clearly as possible. But there came back no answering call.

If the Delaware's supposition as to Clara's voluntary flight was true, then she must have run to a great distance, or she could not have failed hearing the cries. At length the soldier ceased in despair. There was nothing for it but to await the coming day before proceeding further.

Tom secured the horses to a bush, and then taking a philosophical view of the matter, comfortably seated himself in a mossy nook, lighting his pipe and smoking with the gusto of an epicure. But Travers could not content himself thus.

Though he had known the maiden but a few brief hours, as time is usually computed, that seemed most like a year of ordinary time, so full of adventure had it been. The bright eyes and sweet face of Clara Calhoun had made a vivid impression upon his heart, and he felt this suspense very keenly.

No doubt he would have laughed to scorn the idea of his being in love with her, had it suggested itself, but truly the feeling he now experienced was not unlike the first dawning of that subtle sentiment called *love*. Honestly, the gallant captain was in greater danger then than he had ever been before in the whole course of his eventful life, had he but known it.

Travers, in his anxiety to be doing something, scaled the hill and kept a close lookout, to guard against being taken by surprise in case the Arapahoe's messenger should return. But Tom sunk into a peaceful doze beside his rock, no doubt living over again in his dreams the glorious sport he had so lately had in outwitting and putting to rout his foes the Arapahoes.

Put all things must have an end, and that eventful night was no exception to the general rule. With the first golden rays of the rising sun gilding the eastern hill-tops, Travers descended to where Red-skin Tom was awaiting his coming.

Their preparations for the coming campaign were necessarily very brief. A long draught from the creek constituted all their breakfast for the nonce, as the last bit of food had passed their lips on the preceding night.

Then while the soldier secured the horses for marching, Tom quartered the ground adjoining the covert, where still lay the slaughtered Kisch-kouch, searching for the trail of the missing maiden. In a few minutes his glad cry echoed forth, and Travers knew that the quest had been successful.

As he hastened to the spot, his eyes, though keen, were at fault, though Tom declared the trail was remarkably plain—that Clara had passed over the ground at a rapid pace, though alone. A joyous cry burst from the captain's lips at this welcome announcement, for now he did not doubt of being successful in finding the girl in a very short time.

It also confirmed the supposition of the Delaware, that she had taken affright at the wild tumult attending the surprise, and perhaps had fancied her friends were being overpowered. But now Tom stood upon his dignity as chief trailer, and motioned Travers back, to act as rear-guard.

The trail led down the hillside for some little distance, then crossed the ridge and descended into the level prairie beyond. Not even Travers could easily note the dainty footprints upon the dew-dampened ground.

He also saw with pleasure that its course was on

heading almost directly for the camping-ground of his own train, so that they were in reality losing but very little time. This he rejoiced in, for he knew that his men would be uneasy at his long absence, as they had not intended stopping out over night.

For several miles the trail continued, not in a direct line, but zig-zag hither and yon, as if the girl had become confused and wandered aimlessly in a roundabout manner. And while Tom traced this out, step by step, Travers, seated upon a horse, gazed keenly around in every direction, hoping to thus gain sight of the wanderer sooner than otherwise.

And his search proved successful, for, just as Tom uttered a cry of surprise, Travers caught sight of a human form upon the swell of a hill, perhaps a mile away. Then the figure abruptly disappeared from view.

"Ugh! look dere!" muttered Tom, as he came to an abrupt stop.

Travers followed the direction indicated by the outstretched finger. The trail they were following suddenly became a double one!

CHAPTER XI.

REUNITED.

It was well-nigh daydawn, and Buenos Ayres trudged wearily on, foot-store and almost exhausted by his severe toil. His mind was filled with doubt and fear.

He believed that he had more than covered the distance mentioned by Tom Maxwell as intervening between the corral and the Main Trail, but yet he had not observed any trace of it. Could it be possible that he had crossed the Trail unknowingly? He feared greatly that he had done so.

"It will not do to turn back on an uncertainty," he muttered, as he paused to glance around him once more. "And yet a mistake now would be awful! If I only knew the country better!"

But then once more he pressed on, keeping as direct a course as lay in his power. And as he gained the next ridge he again paused, loping from its summit to discover the desired landmark.

But, if he did not see what he sought, another object met his gaze. One that caused his heart to leap to his very throat, while his brain grew dizzy with a wild, delirious hope.

Upon a crest to his left Ayres beheld a human form that, in the grim, gray light, was indistinct and phantom-like. But still he believed that he could discern the flowing drapery of a woman!

Ayres had learned a lesson by that night's events, and still uncertain that the distant figure was not that of an enemy, he sunk down into the tall grass, and then peered keenly toward the spot where the vision had appeared. And, as he awaited, he saw that it was approaching, and was indeed a woman!

How his heart leaped then! A woman—might it not be his lost love, who had so strangely disappeared from their midst?

And yet, how could it be? Clara had ridden away on her horse; this woman was on foot, many miles from the spot where he had last seen his friend.

Though the coming sun gilded the eastern horizon, the swale in which the woman now was, was still gloomy, and only with the greatest difficulty could Ayres discern her shape at all. But then she began ascending the hill, almost directly toward him.

Trembling in every fiber of his being, the young man awaited the result, fearful lest his new-born hope should be dashed to the ground, after all. It did not seem possible that this could be Clara.

But then a glad cry—a cry so full of joy and heartfelt exultation—broke from his lips. The light fell full upon the features of her who approached, and Ayres knew that he beheld his lost love, Clara Calhoun!

She evidently heard the cry, for she paused and half-turned as if to flee. Then he sprang up, calling aloud her name, as he darted toward her trembling figure.

She stood as if petrified, then, with a glad cry, sunk to the ground, laughing and weeping at the same time. Her overtasked powers now seemed to give way before this unexpected happiness, and she sunk into a deathlike swoon, as her lover clasped her to his broad breast, covering her pale and haggard face with passionate kisses.

For a moment Buenos acted like one demented, but then as he found she did not return his caresses, a great fear assailed him; he feared she was dead. And, indeed, her looks favored this supposition.

So pale and ghastly, lying against his heart like one utterly devoid of life. But this great sorrow was spared the young man.

Soon, beneath the fervid pressure of his lips, the color and warmth came back to her face and then her eyes opened. The wild, hunted look quickly disappeared from them, and with a low, glad cry her arms wound around his neck.

"Thank God! you have found me, Buenos!" she murmured, faintly.

"But where have you been, darling? Why did you leave us so strangely?"

Whereupon Clara briefly detailed her adventures of the past night, adding:

"I saw them all together, shouting and screaming, shooting at each other, and it frightened me terribly. What could these two men, though so brave, do against six great Indians? I believed they must both be killed, and then as I thought of how the savages would hunt for and find me, it seemed as though I would go crazy! I would rather die than fall into their hands, and yet I knew that they would capture me if I should stay there until it was all over.

"So I turned and fled, not knowing whither I

went, but only thinking to escape from these dreadful savages. I ran on until I fell from weakness, but then, as I fancied I could hear them coming after me, I arose and kept on, only knowing that I was running away from them. I did not know where I was, nor whither I was going, and I believe that I must have died had not you found me, dear Buenos," she added, with a hysterical sob.

"Poor Clara—how you must have suffered!" murmured Ayres, pressing his lips to her brow.

"Indeed I have—more than words can tell. But I knew you would come for me—I felt sure you would not leave me to die here all alone. Poor father—how he must have suffered from my thoughtlessness!"

"My God! I forgot—and here I have lost over an hour!" exclaimed Buenos, springing to his feet in dismay at his remissness.

"What—what is it, Buenos?" inquired Clara, in vague alarm.

"The train—I was sent for help. The Indians, under Dusky Dick, attacked it last night, and I fear my thoughtlessness will be their ruin," agitatedly added Ayres.

"He was with those after me," shuddered Clara. "But help—where can you find it here? We are alone—God only knows where!"

"There was a government train close behind us, when we left the Main Trail, and I was searching for them, but—"

"He belonged to one—Captain Travers, I mean. It can not be far away from here. Ah, if we can only find it!" hastily cried Clara.

"Do you know in what direction? Did you hear him say where it was?"

"No—or if I did, I forgot. I was so badly frightened, you know."

"We must find it—I must. But you—my poor darling—you are too tired to walk so far and fast."

"No—I am strong now, since you have come. I can walk, oh, so far; never fear. Besides, it is for father—and our friends. And I could not stay here—I should die of fear. They would catch me, I know!"

"Well, we must try it. Remember that your father's life may depend upon your own, Clara, and bear up if you can. It will be hard—I wish I could spare you—but there is no help for it."

The sun was now quite high above the hills, for young Ayres had lost a good hour listening to Clara's story, and now they pressed on at a fair pace, though ignorant whether they were pursuing the right course or were going widely astray.

But they were destined to meet with another interruption, right speedily. They had just gained the next ridge when Clara suddenly uttered a little cry of affright.

"Ah! Buenos—look there—the Indians! My God! we are lost!" she gasped, as, with outstretched hand, she guided the gaze of her companion toward the ridge they had just left but a few moments before.

One quick glance satisfied Buenos of the correctness of her fears. He saw a little group of horsemen, that he believed were mounted Indians.

"Quick! stoop down, Clara! They have not seen us yet, and if we hide they may pass by without noticing our trail. Follow me—quick!" Ayres hissed, as, crouching low down, he half-led, half-dragged his companion down the hillside, making toward a small clump of timber growing in the bottom of the vale.

Toward this they ran at full speed, and had barely gained its shelter when the horsemen reached the ridge they had just left. A wild cry came to the ears of the fugitives, and then they saw the horsemen dash furiously toward their refuge.

"Keep behind me, Clara," muttered Ayres, as he closely examined the condition of his revolver. "They will not find us tame victims. They must pay a price for our lives."

"There are only two—perhaps they are—"

"See the other horses—four of them! They must have riders, who are hiding behind their bodies. Look, they stop! I'll—"

"No—no; don't shoot. Buenos," cried Clara, as she seized the already-leveled revolver. "See, they are friends—Captain Travers and the Delaware, who saved me from the Indians!"

"Are you sure, Clara?" doubtfully replied Ayres; but then a cry from one of the men settled this doubt most agreeably.

"Miss Calhoun, you know us; we are friends. Who is that with you? If an enemy, we will rescue you from him."

Clara and Buenos stepped forth from the cover, and then there ensued a warm greeting between the quartette, for even the Delaware appeared overjoyed at beholding the pale-faced squaw once more.

"Buenos, tell this gentleman—I know he will help us," eagerly uttered Clara, thinking first of her father's peril.

In a few brief words Ayres stated the position of affairs at the emigrant-train, as he had left it, and implored assistance. The captain, though experiencing a momentary sensation something akin to jealousy, at seeing how confidently Clara clung to the young man—was greatly excited and promptly offered his aid in the matter.

"Certainly I will. My old commander in danger! Good Lord! how strange! Quick—help the lady to mount; there's plenty of horses fortunately. The camp is only about two miles away now. We'll get there almost before you know it; and then for these red-skinned devils. No offense, hope, Red-skin?"

"No—me all white man now. Cuss Injuns all want; plenty bad, you like—all but Delaware," grunted Tom.

Buenos quickly lifted Clara upon one of the horses, and then, following suit, the quartette were

speedily dashing over the prairie, under the guidance of Red-skin Tom, with the two extra horses following closely in their wake.

The spirits of the two lovers rose with every long leap of their mettlesome horses, though Buenos Ayres could not repress certain misgivings as he thought on the length of time that had transpired since he left the emigrant party. Could they have held out through the long, fearful night?

He feared they could not have done so; something seemed to tell him that the rescuing party would arrive only in time to bestow upon his late comrades a Christian burial. And beneath his breath he swore a deep and fearful vengeance, should such indeed be the case.

They had ridden but a short distance, when Red-skin Tom uttered a low whoop, and pointed before them, though he did not slacken his pace. Thus directed, the eyes of all noted the presence of a small body of horsemen, just rising the second ridge from them, who had evidently caught sight of the quartette, at the same time, for they suddenly drew rein.

"Don't stop—they're friends," cried Travers. "I can tell my boys as far as eye can reach. They're out after me, I don't doubt; we stayed so much longer than expected."

At about the same time, the soldiers evidently made the same discovery, for they gave their horses free rein, and dashed forward with loud cheers. A smile rested upon the captain's lips at this. One could easily see that he was a beloved leader, and proud of his boys in blue.

"Well, Morris," he said, as the leader of the dozen men saluted, "glad to see you. How's all at the camp?"

"All well, sir, but very anxious because you stayed out so long. I made bold to take a few of the boys and ride out to see if we could be of any use," respectfully replied the sergeant, curiously eyeing the horses and the two extra riders.

"There's work cut out for you, and hot work, too, if I mistake not. But I know that that is no drawback," laughed Travers, as the party again broke into a rapid gallop.

"Indeed it ain't, cap'n. Injuns—if I may ask?"

"Yes. They've attacked the train this lady and gentleman belong to—the one that passed us at Dutchman's."

In a few minutes more the party had reached the camping-ground of the government train, where now was all excitement, for the news quickly spread, and was greeted with loud, hearty cheers, for 'twas not every day that the boys got a pleasure ride, and a brush with the Indians to wind up with. The only fear they had was that, as some must remain behind to guard the train, they might be the unlucky ones.

"Boys," said Travers, riding out a little from the rest, "how many of you wish to take a skurry after the Indians this morning?"

With loud cheers, every man, soldiers, teamsters and all, flocked forward, each striving to be foremost. A glad smile played around their leader's lips.

"Good! though it's only what I expected from you. But you can't all go. Sergeant Morris?"

"Here, sir."

"Pick out thirty men, and see that they're ready in ten minutes. Never mind rations; take only arms and plenty of ammunition."

"Yes, sir. Half the time 'll do."

"Now, Miss Calhoun, if you will come with us, I will see you more comfortably placed than on that horse. The sutler's family is with us, and will see that you have all that you require."

"Thank you, captain, but it is needless; I am going to my father with the rest of you," firmly replied the maiden.

"But think—how we must ride, to do any good, and then there will probably be hard fighting at the end of it," he urged, perplexedly.

"I have thought. Father is in trouble—perhaps dead or badly wounded, and I not there! I must go!"

"Clara," said Buenos, riding to her side, "listen to me. You are nearly sick now, with what you have passed through. Such a trial as this will be would prove your death. You would die before you got half-way. You must stay here—for my sake, if not your own."

"No—I will go!"

"Clara, you must not. Don't oblige me to use compulsion; but I know that you could never stand the ride. You must stay. I will either come or send you word, as soon as it is all over."

With a hysterical sob the maiden gave way, and allowed the captain to lead her to the wagon set apart for the family of the sutler. Leaving her in charge of the worthy wife, he hastened back to the men, who were now in readiness.

From the description of the spot, as given by Ayres, Red-skin Tom declared that he knew it well, and could guide the party directly there, as the crow flies. And then they set off upon their mission, at a pace that satisfied even Ayres, urgent as was his haste.

"Keep up, boys," shouted Travers. "We're riding for life or death, now, and if your horses can't stand the pace, follow on the best you can. You may be in at the death, anyhow."

They numbered some thirty-five, all told, and not one felt a doubt as to how the affair would turn out, provided the emigrants were still holding out, when they arrived. But Buenos had grave fears on this point.

And still on they thundered, no longer in a compact body, but strung out at short intervals, as the better or more speedy horses took the front. At their head rode Ayres, Travers, and Red-skin Tom,

the former mounted upon one of the captured Mustangs; a noble brute.

On until the head grew dizzy with the swift motion; until the foam dropped from the horses' lips and flecked their counters; until their glossy coats were darkened with sweat, together with dust cast up by the trampling hoofs.

It was a wild, fearful ride, and the brains of the men seemed intoxicated, so wildly did they whirl. Even their horses seemed to catch the infection, for they thundered on as if mad, snorting and fretting, with eyeballs wildly staring, fiery and bloodshot.

Then Red-skin Tom abruptly jerked his horse up, casting him upon his haunches. A motion of his hand checked the others.

Soaring to their ears, borne upon the light air, came the confusedly-mingled sounds of rifle-shots, shrill yells and hoarse shouts, from beyond the swell of the prairie. The cause was but too evident.

The savages were desperately attacking the emigrant train. Then all was not yet over—they might still be in time!

"Wait until all come up—then one steady charge, and they're ours!" whispered Travers to the impetuous Ayres.

CHAPTER XII. DOG EAT DOG.

THE old guide, Tom Maxwell, gave himself up for lost. The fire blazed up brightly—the smoke blinded his eyes—the heat began to scorch his garments. His fate seemed indubitably sealed. But such was not to be, just then. A sudden interruption came, from an utterly unlooked-for source.

The quick clatter of a horse's hoofs was heard upon the shingle that covered the base of the hill, and then a foam-flecked steed dashed up beside the blazing fire. With a hoarse cry, its rider sprang to the ground, and dashed through the group of startled savages, hurling them rudely aside to clear a passage.

Ere a hand could be raised to check him, the blazing fagots were kicked aside and the daring man stood close to Maxwell. One cut of the gleaming knife severed the rope that bound him to the stake.

But then, with a howl, the Arapahoe chief, Wapashaw, sprang forward, and hurled the man to the ground, ten feet away.

All this passed so quickly that Maxwell was still blinking to clear his eyes of smoke, unconscious that his bonds had been partially cut, as his hands were still bound behind his back.

The man sprang to his feet with a cry of defiance. And then the features of Dusky Dick were revealed. Maxwell stared at him in open-mouthed wonder.

"How dare you do this, chief?" uttered the White Snake, in a voice low and even; but oh! what deadly ire that tone contained! "You know our agreement—this brave was to be given to me, unharmed."

"Dare! Wapashaw is an Arapahoe chief. What is there he cannot dare? Who shall speak hot words in his ear? Not the pale-faced coward—not the White Snake!"

"You should know whether I am a coward or not by this time, chief. If you say I am, I say you lie. This brave is my property—who dares do him harm until I speak the word?"

"I, Wapashaw, the Arapahoe! I dare harm him! See! I defy you—I kill him before your very eyes!" yelled the savage, now thoroughly angered, as he drew his tomahawk and sprang toward the motionless form of the scout.

But like a meteor, the form of Dusky Dick shot forward, and then his small fist alighted with crushing force full between the eyes of the savage Hercules, hurling him to the ground like a clod. Instantly all was the greatest confusion.

Several braves sprang toward the renegade, with flashing weapons, but he met them boldly, with drawn revolvers. Twice did there come a sharp report—twice did the death-yell soar upward above the frightful din.

But Wapashaw arose and motioned his braves back. With a gesture that Dusky Dick well understood, and was not slow to accept, he advanced to the duel.

Casting his pistols aside, the renegade met his foe with equal weapons. Knife slashed against knife, and the strife began that could end only in death.

As Wapashaw sprang upon him, Maxwell had naturally shrunk aside, and to his surprise he found that he was free, save his hands. That was the first knowledge he had of the timely act of Dusky Dick.

Then, as the wild strife began, he made a desperate effort to burst the cords that held his hands. Straining until he thought all was in vain, the thongs suddenly parted with a sharp twang.

Unnoticed in the confusion, he darted toward the crest of the hill that he knew overlooked the river. Down for nearly a hundred feet this abruptly fell.

It was truly a fearful leap, but the only chance for safety. All other routes were cut off by the enemy.

Hesitating not a moment, Tom sprang boldly out over the dizzy height, and, shooting down like a stone, entered the water with a sullen thud.

In another moment he was swimming rapidly down the stream, unharmed by the frightful descent, toward the corral, unnoticed by all save those within the barricade. And this he gained in safety, where he was warmly greeted by his comrades, who had long since given him up as lost beyond a doubt.

Under less favorable circumstances, this feat would have been impossible to execute successfully. But the attention of all upon the hill was riveted upon the savage struggle between their two leaders,

Dusky Dick and Wapashaw, and they did not give one thought to their captive, supposing him to be firmly bound to the stake.

Then those who were left on guard over the wagon-train had been confused by the sudden extinguishing of the fire and the wild uproar that followed. Fearing their comrades had been surprised by some foe, they one and all dashed at full speed toward the spot, either not observing the leap of Tom Maxwell, or else, in the dim light, believed it to be one of the combatants.

Thus it was the old guide performed the seemingly impossible feat without interruption.

In a short time the duel ended, but from the corral it could not be seen which had been the victor, and then the disappearance of the captive was first noticed. The confusion was then really appalling.

Search was immediately made through the hills, the Indians believing that he had fled in that direction, as none of them coming from the plains had met him.

This search continued for a long time, when, after they had abandoned it as useless, one brave noticed the dirt displaced by the scout's feet in springing over the precipice. That told the tale, and, fairly wild with anger, the Indians rushed down and attacked the corral, fighting with a desperate fury worthy a better cause.

But they were as bravely met. Rifle-shots answered arrow-flights, until the strife became hand-to-hand. Over the barricades swarmed the painted demons, until the interior was filled with a confused mass of writhing, struggling humanity, battling furiously, desperately.

But then came a glad sound to the ears of the overpowered whites—the loud, hearty cheer, emanating from unmistakably white men's throats. Then the thundering of many hoofs—the sharp cracking of carbines and revolvers.

Fully as well did the Arapahoes recognize those shouts; they had heard similar ones before, and they knew too well the prowess of the boys in blue, to stand and wait their close acquaintance.

There uprose the cry of retreat—and, like one man, the red-skins tore themselves free from their antagonists, and fled, on foot, on horseback, as fate favored them.

And among them the soldiers raged furiously, led by Travers, Ayres and Red-skin Tom. The latter fairly outdid himself, and returned with girdle literally crowded with scalps.

There is but little more to add. That was a glad meeting between Buenos and Calhoun, especially when the young man announced the safety of Clara. He was truly the lion of the hour, but he bore his honors with becoming meekness.

Then when the stragglers had all come in, the dead whites were collected and afforded a Christian burial. It was a melancholy sight, and not one dry eye—unless it might be those of Red-skin Tom, who was not remarkable for his sensitiveness—was there in the encampment.

Taught a sad lesson by the recent events, Calhoun decided to return to the Main Trail and remain under the protection of his fellow-soldier's command until the rest of the road was passed, and the two enjoyed many an hour, over their recollections.

Well, the train got safely to its destination, without any more serious accidents, and, in due time, Clara Calhoun was made Mrs. Buenos Ayres; and Tom Maxwell was at the wedding, and danced with "pritty."

Dusky Dick was supposed to have been killed during his duel with Wapashaw, for he was never heard of afterward.

And thus we leave them.

THE END.

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